

# The United States Steps into Cuba 1898

## Introduction:

Before we look at the reasons for U.S. intervention in Cuba in 1898 let us provide the necessary backdrop to this historical drama.

America tried at least four times to buy Cuba: 1848, 1852, 1854 and 1859. Each offer was refused by the Mother Country, Spain. If Cuba became an independent country she could have a deeper and profitable relation with her.

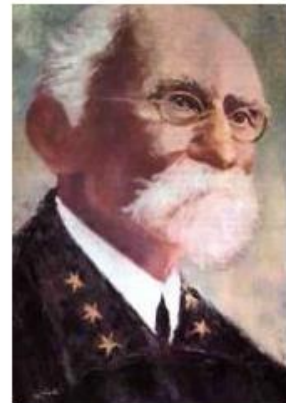
The Cuban War of Independence or the Spanish Cuban War began in **1895**. It was led by the great patriots **Jose Marti, Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez**. Their main aim of course was to get Spain to grant them their independence. The one lesson that they had learnt from their previous battle for independence (Ten Years War (1868-1878) was that it would take much "convincing" to do this. It seemed as if the nineteenth (19<sup>th</sup>) century was going to end and they would still be ruled by Spain.



*Jose Marti*



*Antonio Maceo*



*Maximo Gomez*

The then U.S. President maintained neutrality as the war progressed into its second year although he was seriously pressured by both the American Public and Congress to become involved. Why then was the decision taken to get involved in 1898?

## 1. ECONOMIC INTERESTS

### Investments

1. By 1898 the U.S. had invested some fifty million dollars (**\$50M**) in Cuba.

2. American merchants, ship owners and bankers (financers) invested in the production and marketing of Cuban **sugar**.

3. The U.S. invested also in: **coffee, cocoa and tobacco plantations and cattle ranches, railway construction and mining**: for example Chrome Mines in Santiago were controlled by the Pennsylvania Steel Company.

### **Trade**

4. Eighty three per cent (**83 %**) of Cuba's exports went to the U.S. In return they bought foodstuff, lumber and manufactured goods from the U.S. Annual trade figures were estimated at one hundred million dollars (**\$100M**) or thirty eight per cent (**38%**) of total imports. This includes a half of Cuba's total tobacco output.

### **Businesses**

5. The United States not only invested in various industries and companies but they actually bought and operated several economic enterprises. For example, the American company Edwin and Atkins bought and operated the Soledad sugar estates while New York investors began operating the Tuinucua estate in 1893. There were of course a number of other commercial activities that they owned and operated. You may want to take the time to research and list some of them.

## **2. DEFENSE**

She desired to annex Cuba for strategic reasons. Cuba commanded the approaches to the Windward Passage while its proximity to Florida and the Central American mainland would certainly be of use in the near future. It would be **the** perfect site therefore for a naval or military **base**.

## **3. PUBLIC PRESSURE and CAMPAIGN**

American Journalism or the "Yellow Press" played an integral part in 'forcing' America's hand. There was strong competition between the **New York Journal** owned by Randolph Hearst and the **New York World** owned by Joseph **Pulitzer**. Each sought to outdo the other in **sensationalism**, the hallmark of U.S. mass media. They presented fantastic graphics: artist's impression of what they had heard. Their shocking headlines of the war in Cuba, took sensational journalism to its peak even though it meant 'bending or twisting' the truth at times. They went for headlines that caught one's attention and stirred one's passion. They reported endless stories of Spanish' excessive abuse of innocent Spanish peasants who were said to be feeding and hiding rebels in the countryside.

On hearing this, the U.S. public began to put pressure on the Government to stop the war. As the watchdog and consummate Humanitarian she felt it was her 'duty' and Manifest Destiny to intervene.



*Joseph Pulitzer.*

[The Pulitzer Prize](#) was established in 1917

#### **4. POLICIES**

The U.S. decided to apply the Manifest Destiny and Munroe Doctrine. **How dare Spain** deny a member of the Western Hemisphere (which the U.S. controlled) their independence? Rumour has it, that some **Cuban nationalists appealed to the US for help**. They **gravitated** towards the superior power and she 'had to' intervene.