

Spanish American War Inquiry Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Why did the U.S. invade Cuba?

Materials:

- Intro movie: <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/>
- *Maine* Powerpoint (from *Maine* Explosion lesson)
- Copies of Spanish American War Documents A and B
- Copies of Spanish American War Graphic Organizer
- Copies of Spanish American War Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Write inquiry question on board: Why did the U.S. invade Cuba?

In June 1898, the U.S. sent troops into Cuba. Over the next few days, we are going to investigate why. I will play the following movie twice. Both times, listen for all the different possible reasons why the U.S. chose to invade Cuba. The first time, just listen.

2. Show movie first time while students simply watch.

Show movie again. This time when you watch it, take notes about anything that might help you answer the question: Why did the U.S. invade Cuba?

3. Elicit student hypotheses: Ask students to share some of the possible reasons the movie presents for why the U.S. invaded Cuba. List these on board. Ask students to generate additional reasons to add to the list.

[Note to teacher: Keep this list of hypotheses in a format that is accessible to students (chart paper, overhead, student notebooks, etc.) You will refer to them throughout this instructional sequence].

By show of hands, elicit which hypotheses students favored.

4. Hand out Spanish American War Graphic Organizer.

Show slide #2 from *Maine* Powerpoint. Ask students to fill in the Graphic Organizer for “Awake! United States.”

Discussion question: Which hypothesis does this support?

(Students should see that this document supports the hypothesis that the US went to war because of the explosion of the *Maine*).

5. Hand out Spanish American War Documents A and B and Guiding Questions. Ask students to answer Guiding Questions for each document, and then to fill in the Graphic Organizer for these sources.

6. Discussion:

Look back at the list of hypotheses on the board. Ask students:

- How do these sources support or contest any of the hypotheses?
- Are any hypotheses more convincing to you now?
- Do you think the U.S. invaded Cuba for humanitarian reasons? Why or why not?
- Should we add any new hypotheses? Change or eliminate any existing hypotheses?

Citations:

Lee, Fitzhugh. Fitzhugh Lee, US Consulate-General in Cuba, to Assistant Secretary of State Day, 3 December, 1897. In *Message from the President of the United States, transmitting, in response to the resolution of the House of Representatives, Dated February 14, 1898, Calling for information in respect to the condition of the reconcentrados in Cuba, the state of the war and the country, and the prospects of projected autonomy in that island*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898. 11-12.

<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/0/inquiry/main/resources/2/>

Beveridge, Albert J. "March of the Flag." (September 16, 1898, Indiana). In *The Meaning of the Times, and Other Speeches*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1908. 47-57.

<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/0/inquiry/main/resources/7/>

Document A: Reconcentration Camps

By the late 1800s, the Spanish were losing control of their colony, Cuba. Concerned about guerilla warfare in the countryside, they moved rural Cubans to “reconcentration” camps, or “reconcentrados” where the Spanish claimed they would be better able to protect them. In this telegram, Fitzhugh Lee, U.S. Consul-General in Havana, describes life in the “reconcentrados.” A consul-general is a government official living in a foreign city whose job is to protect U.S. citizens and promote trade.

SIR: . . . [W]e will relate to you what we saw with our own eyes:

Four hundred and sixty women and children thrown on the ground, heaped pell-mell as animals, some in a dying condition, others sick and others dead, without the slightest cleanliness, nor the least help. . .

. . . Among the many deaths we witnessed there was one scene impossible to forget. There is still alive the only living witness, a young girl of 18 years, whom we found seemingly lifeless on the ground; on her right-hand side was the body of a young mother, cold and rigid, but with her young child still alive clinging to her dead breast; on her left-hand side was also the corpse of a dead woman holding her son in a dead embrace . . .

The circumstances are the following: complete accumulation of bodies dead and alive, so that it was impossible to take one step without walking over them; the greatest want of cleanliness, want of light, air, and water; the food lacking in quality and quantity what was necessary to sustain life . . .

From all this we deduct that the number of deaths among the reconcentrados has amounted to 77 per cent.

Source: *Excerpt from unsigned note that was included with a telegram sent by Fitzhugh Lee, U.S. Consul-General in Cuba, November 27, 1897. Fitzhugh Lee said the author of the note was “a man of integrity and character.”*

Document B: March of the Flag

Fellow citizens, it is a noble land that God has given us; a land that can feed and clothe the world; . . . It is a mighty people that he has planted on this soil . . . It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon his chosen people; . . . a history of soldiers who carried the flag across the blazing deserts and through the ranks of hostile mountains, even to the gates of sunset . . .

The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer: The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. I answer, We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent.

They ask us how we will govern these new possessions. I answer: If England can govern foreign lands, so can America. If Germany can govern foreign lands, so can America. If they can supervise protectorates, so can America. . . .

What does all this mean for every one of us? It means opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic, the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen. It means that the resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased . . .

In Cuba, alone, there are 15,000,000 acres of forest unacquainted with the axe. There are exhaustless mines of iron. . . . There are millions of acres yet unexplored. . . . It means new employment and better wages for every laboring man in the Union. . . .

Ah! as our commerce spreads, the flag of liberty will circle the globe . . . And, as their thunders salute the flag, benighted peoples will know that the voice of Liberty is speaking, at last, for them; that civilization is dawning, at last, for them Liberty and Civilization, those children of Christ's gospel . . . Fellow Americans, we are God's chosen people. . . .

Source: Excerpt from Albert J. Beveridge's Senate campaign speech, September 16, 1898. Beveridge gave this speech while he was campaigning to become a senator for Indiana. The speech helped him win the election and made him one of the leading advocates of American expansion.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

Document A: Reconcentration Camps

1. **Sourcing:** Why might Lee have chosen to send this description to Washington?
Check his job responsibilities (see header) before writing your answer.
2. **Close Reading:** Notice the graphic descriptions. How do these details about the living conditions affect you as you read? Why might these descriptions be so detailed?
3. **Contextualizing:** If they could have seen this letter, how do you think people in the U.S. in 1897 might have reacted to this description of the reconcentration camps?

Document B: March of the Flag

1. **Sourcing:** This speech is part of a political campaign. How does that influence what you can expect of it?
2. **Close Reading:** What do the following phrases suggest about Beveridge's view of Americans as compared with people of other nations?
 - a) "noble land that God has given us"
 - b) "applies only to those who are capable of self-government"
 - c) "civilization is dawning, at last, for them"
3. **Contextualizing:** According to Beveridge, what else was going on in the U.S. and the rest of the world that made expansion a good idea?