

The University Of North Carolina At Asheville

Yellow Journalism and the *USS Maine* Explosion: An Analysis of Yellow Journalism's
Dominant Coverage of the *USS Maine* Explosion, and How It's Coverage Affected the
Traditional Press

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the History Department for Consideration for the
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“USS MAINE BLOWN UP: MANY YOUNG SAILORS DROWN DUE TO SPANISH TREACHERY” read the front page headline from the *New York Evening World* on February 17, 1898.¹ While on the day after, the *Pittsburgh Gazette* printed a much more cautious headline, “MAINE EXPLODES: PRESENTLY EXPLOSION UNDER INVESTIGATION.”² The contrast between the two different headlines illustrates the conflicting styles of the two major forms of press at the time, yellow and the traditional. The yellow newspapers reported the explosion and also sensationalized their version of the disaster. They dealt with scandals involving criminal, political, and military topics. They dramatized stories creating a heightened interest with the general public. Their reporting was highly subjective, exhibiting extremely slanted points of view and incorrect information, in order to sell entertaining newspapers. The traditional newspapers sought a balanced view of explosion; according to the owner of the *New York Times*, Adolph Ochs, traditional newspapers tended to “provide all the plain, unvarnished news impartially without fear or favor, regardless of any party, sect, or interest involved.”³ The *USS Maine* explosion led to a war between the United States and Spain in the Caribbean, as well as between the traditional and yellow press at home over the coverage of the disaster and its aftermath.

On February 15, 1898, immediately after the *USS Maine* explosion, the press began reporting details of the disaster. While covering the explosion, yellow journalists took the forefront of the reporting and dominated the traditional press. In response, the

¹ “USS Maine Blown Up,” *New York Evening World*, February 17, 1898.

² “Maine Explodes,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 18, 1898.

³ Doris Faber, *Printer's Devil to Publisher: Adolph S. Ochs of the New York Times* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome, 1996), 91.

traditional papers accused yellow newspapers of falsifying information, fabricating explanations of the explosion, and having slanted views. However, at the same time traditional newspapers were committing many of the same misdeeds themselves in order to keep up with paper sales of the yellow press.

There are a number of sources about the *USS Maine* explosion and about yellow journalism contemporaneous to the disaster. Many scholarly works have researched the explosion to find out exactly how it happened. Those sources can be spilt into three theories: it was an external explosion, internal explosion, or remains an unsolved mystery.

All of the U.S. Navy's official reports on the *USS Maine* explosion until the 1970s specified that the disaster was caused by an external explosion. The initial inquiry headed by Captain William Sampson in 1898 and Rear Admiral James Vreeland's report in 1911, concluded that the explosion was caused by an external source. After the Navy's investigations, a few scholars began looking into the explosion, including historians Brayton Harris in 1965 and Richard Basoco in 1966. They concurred with the initial reports that the explosion was external. Harris believed the Spanish, who were in control of Cuba at the time and did not like an American battleship on their coast, had destroyed the *USS Maine*. He thought a Spanish subordinate of General Weyler, the Spanish commander in Cuba, or a Spaniard who was sympathetic to the Cuban rebel cause and wanted American intervention in Cuba, had triggered the detonation.⁴ Richard Basoco also looked into the cause of the explosion, and felt that a "terrorist" had destroyed the *USS Maine*. Basing his opinion on an article written by Henry Drain, who

⁴ Brayton Harris, *The Age of Battleship 1890-1922* (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1965), 45.

had overheard a supposed plot to blow up the *USS Maine*, Basoco thought a mine had planted by a Cuban wanting America's help.⁵

During the late 1970s, views on the cause of the *USS Maine* explosion began to change. Various scholars, including Robert Johnson in 1977 and John Taylor in 1978, wrote articles asserting the *USS Maine* exploded internally from spontaneous coal combustion. Johnson used Admiral H. G. Rickover's U.S. Naval inquiry of 1976 as his main supporting evidence. Rickover discovered that the *USS Maine*, before traveling to Cuba, had refueled in Newport News, Virginia with a type of bituminous coal that was known for spontaneous combustion. This information supported the theory that coal had combusted and sparked a major explosion in the magazine bunker.⁶ Rickover also used two experienced researchers from the Navy Ship Research and Development Center, I.S. Hansen and Robert S. Price, to re-examine the *USS Maine* explosion. By using computer generated models of the ship, they concluded that the inverted V-shape of the *USS Maine*'s keel was not from a mine, as had been previously thought, but instead from the keel "having buckled upward as a result of the bow's having sunk more rapidly than the remainder of the ship."⁷ Taylor also examined eyewitness reports and found little or no evidence suggesting a disturbance in the water until the ship had started to sink. If a mine explosion occurred, there should have been a massive water disturbance.⁸

However, while various scholars started to believe that the *USS Maine* had exploded internally, still many continued to assert it was external. In 1995, Peggy

⁵ Richard M. Basoco, "What Really Happened to the *Maine*," *American History Illustrated* 1, no. 3 (1966): 20-21.

⁶ Robert Johnson, "How the Battleship *Maine* was Destroyed," *American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (April 1977): 454-455.

⁷ John M. Taylor, "Remembering the *Maine*," *American History Illustrated* 13, no. 1 (1978): 39.

⁸ *Ibid*, 40-41.

Samuels and Harold Samuels agreed with Harris and Basoco that it was an external detonation. They used divers' information on the wreck, citing the hull plating which protected the magazines, as having been blown inward, ostensibly from an outside force. They also found that not all of the magazines had exploded. If combustion had sparked a magazine explosion, all of the magazines should have detonated.⁹ Then in 1998, historian Thomas B. Allen, through the use of the *National Geographic* study of the *USS Maine*, likewise concluded the ship exploded externally. The *National Geographic* hired Advanced Marine Enterprises (AME), an engineering company used by the U.S. Navy to find the true nature of the *USS Maine* explosion. AME, after utilizing computer models, discovered that only a 100 pound, black powder mine could have caused the extensive damage to the ship.¹⁰

From the 1950s to the present day, other scholars have determined that the *USS Maine* explosion remains a mystery. In 1958, John Edward Weems believed divers could have been mistaken in their assessment of the damage to the keel. If the keel had originally been tilted outward by an internal explosion, it would have ultimately been tilted inward by the force of hitting the muddy bank.¹¹ Then in 2002, Tim McNeese examined the AME report and found that when AME was calculating the velocity of possible coal combustion force an error was made by not recalibrating the strength of steel. If calibrated correctly, the report could have been evidence of an external

⁹ Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Remembering the Maine* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1995), 308-312.

¹⁰ Thomas B. Allen, "What Really Sank the *Maine*," *Naval History* 12, no. 2 (1998): 37.

¹¹ John Edward Weems, *The Fate of the Maine* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958), 170-172.

explosion.¹² With faults in reports such as the AME's, along with McNeese's finding, it is hard to say how the *USS Maine* actually exploded and it is, therefore, still a mystery.

Other scholarly works have focused on yellow journalism during the time of the *USS Maine* explosion. A new approach to news coverage started during the Civil War, asserts scholar Hazel Dicken-Garcia: “[The Civil War signaled] the end of a kind of journalism associated with people reading the newspaper for the editor's views. Instead readers looked more for what correspondents reported.”¹³ However, in the mid-nineteenth century, the way news was covered changed again with the introduction of yellow journalism. Started primarily by New York newspapers, including Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and, a short time later, by William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, this type of journalism abounded during the later part of the nineteenth century. Pulitzer and Hearst's style differed from the traditional press coverage approach, in which coverage “developed mainly out of patterns set by newspapers that aimed at the educated audience, used information to emphasize facts, and minimize opinions.”¹⁴ The yellow press only covered more salacious stories, which people wanted to read, particularly political and military matters involving corruption and scandal.¹⁵

Scholars James Wyman Barnett and George Juergens have depicted Joseph Pulitzer as a leading yellow journalist. They describe Pulitzer as a newspaper businessman, who was in the newspaper business to increase circulation and make money. Joseph Pulitzer realized that if the Spanish were to blame for the disaster, the

¹² Tim McNeese, *Remembering the Maine: The Spanish-American War Begins* (Greensboro: Morgan-Reynolds Publishers, Inc., 2002), 105.

¹³ Hazel Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 54.

¹⁵ Joyce Miller, *The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Hayday of Yellow Journalism* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 60.

United States might go to war; readers would then flock to buy his paper for coverage of the war. Thus, Pulitzer tried to refute theories that the explosion was internal and focus the explosion as being external. One way he did this was by telling his editors to only focus on the theory of Spanish intervention in blowing up the *USS Maine*. This meant the editors could only print reports on an external explosion from a mine, torpedo or other explosive device. A second way Pulitzer depicted that the explosion was Spanish fault was by having eyewitness reports from only witnesses loyal to the Cuban rebel cause.¹⁶

Scholars, Joyce Miller, David Nasaw and Ben H. Proctor, wrote about another key figure in yellow journalism during the *USS Maine* explosion, William Randolph Hearst. William Randolph Hearst helped start yellow journalism in the West with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Hearst then left California to compete for more readers, money, and power in New York. Hearst wanted to use his paper to gain more influence and eventually political power. He competed with Pulitzer over the New York newspaper empire with his paper, the *New York Journal*. In order to try to out-do Pulitzer, he increased circulation by hiring Richard Outcault to draw a very popular cartoon strip, *The Yellow Kid*, which people loved to read.¹⁷ *The Yellow Kid* was a boy who was colored yellow and wore a shirt with satirical remarks written on it. These remarks often addressed hot issues, including political corruption and military affairs.¹⁸

During the 1890s, Cubans started to rebel against Spanish colonial rule because they wanted to be free and live by their own standards. Hearst and Pulitzer saw in the Cuban movement an opportunity for the American public to read and react to the cries for

¹⁶ Identical information can be found in George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 143-156; James Wyman Barnett, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1941), 222-233.

¹⁷ Miller, 65-78.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 80.

Cuban liberty. Thus, they decided to report the rebellion with their own motives in mind. They sent teams of correspondents to detail what was happening. In their stories, the correspondents reported the Spanish as ruthless murderers and villains.¹⁹ One key example was from a reporter of the *New York Journal*:

Their [Spanish] treatment of women is unspeakable, and as for the men captured by them alive, the blood curdles in my veins as I think of the atrocity, of the cruelty, practiced on these helpless victims.²⁰

Hearst's paper also incorporated a more slanted view, manipulating the facts when needed to try to make the Spanish look responsible.²¹ Even before the explosion, Hearst tried to accuse the Spanish of evil doings. One edition included a picture of a Spanish soldier killing a Cuban rebel with the caption, "Spanish monsters shoot and kill unarmed Cuban."²² In reality the Cuban had a knife, tried to kill the soldier, and the soldier killed the rebel in self-defense.²³

The yellow press used these tactics to inflame their audience, and to entice them to read more about these and other atrocities performed by the Spanish. The tactics worked; the American public became enraged from reading yellow stories about alleged Spanish atrocities and demanded action. Hearst and Pulitzer argued that the United States must free the Cubans from their captors and, if necessary, go to war to do so. Thus, the papers continued to report and cover the war, as well as increase circulation to meet the American public demand for war details and coverage.²⁴

¹⁹ H.W. Brands, *The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890's* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 50-78.

²⁰ "Spanish Guerillas Bringing "Pacifcos" Into the Camp," *New York Journal*, January 24, 1897.

²¹ David Nasaw, *The Chief: the life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 145-164.

²² Ben H. Proctor, *William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years: 1863-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129-144.

²³ *Ibid*, 133-144.

²⁴ Brands, 100-111.

The low price of yellow newspapers was a key to their success over the traditional papers. On January 4, 1898, the New York yellow newspapers lowered their price to one cent per paper, while the prices of the traditional papers remained at three cents per paper. During the next ten months, from January to October 1898 (when the *Times* lowered its price to one cent), the *New York Journal* and *World* each sold one hundred and ten thousand newspapers daily, while the *Times* lagged behind selling twenty-five thousand and seven hundred a day.²⁵

Along with the circulation increase, the yellow press was able to draw great amounts of capital from advertisements. The yellow newspapers averaged six to eight pages in length with three pages devoted to advertisements, while the traditional newspapers tended to be four to six pages with one page of advertisements.²⁶ From 1890 to 1900, the yellow press drew three hundred and fifty million ads per year at five cents each, which equaled fifty-five percent of their revenue. Meanwhile, the traditional press, from 1890 to 1900, ran one hundred and fifteen million ads per year at six cents, which accounted for forty-five percent of their revenue. The increased capital allowed the yellow newspapers to spend more on coverage of the *USS Maine*, which included the addition of artists to produce illustrations, the hiring of more correspondents, dispatch boats, and presses to print the news faster.²⁷

After Congress and the public heard about the Spanish atrocities, they pressured President William McKinley to act. He called upon the Spanish to halt their mistreatment and give Cubans their freedom. The Spanish refused. At the same time,

²⁵ Sidney Kobre, *The Yellow Press and the Gilded Age* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1964), 78-90.

²⁶ Dicken-Garcia, 89.

²⁷ William S. Rossiter, "Printing and Publishing" in *U.S. Census Reports* 9, 112th census, U.S. Bureau of the Census, (Washington, DC, 1902), 1041-1042.

Cuban rebels continued their protesting against the Spanish in cities such as Havana. They rebelled at Havana's harbor, a major American trading center, so that Spanish as well as American ships could not dock. This hampered American interests in Cuba. In a show of force, President McKinley called upon the battleship *USS Maine* to embark to Havana to protect Americans and their interests. President McKinley also sent the ship as a message: The Spanish had to stop their mistreatment of the Cubans or deal with American intervention. On February 15, 1898, while the *USS Maine* was docked in Havana Harbor, the ship suddenly exploded, killing two hundred and sixty-six of its crew.²⁸

Yellow newspapers after the explosion and throughout the inquiry, maintained the upper hand in news coverage compared to the traditional newspapers. John H. Holmes, a writer for *Munsey's Magazine*, reported that yellow journalists did not care about the amount of money spent to cover the disaster, because money was no object: "Many journalists conceive great undertakings, but refrain from executing them on account of the expense involved. The 'new journalist' is not troubled with hesitation on that score. Like the general who orders guns to be trained in position where effective service can be rendered, he does not stop to count the cost."²⁹ In all, the equivalent in today's currency of fifteen million dollars was spent covering the *USS Maine* explosion.³⁰ The yellow press sometimes offered money to obtain the best information. As Hartley Davis put it, "the fact remains that the 'yellow journals' are the progressive newspapers, those which spend the largest sums to get the latest and best news and to present it most attractively

²⁸ Richard H. Titherington, *A History of the Spanish-American War of 1898* (Freeport, NY: Books for Library Press, 1971), 40-46, 60-69.

²⁹ John H. Holmes, "The New Journalism and the Old," *Munsey's Magazine* (March 1898): 78.

³⁰ Bullard, 143.

and forcefully.”³¹ William Randolph Hearst of the *Journal* placed an ad every day until the inquiry was over, trying to get new leads on any perpetrator responsible for destroying the *USS Maine* with the offer: “\$50,000 REWARD! For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!”³²

Money allowed yellow newspapers to have greater coverage of the *USS Maine* explosion. They could afford to pay more sources for information, ship in their editors’ best hand picked correspondents, and have plenty of dispatch boats to cover the explosion before the traditional press ever knew an explosion even occurred. As Captain Charles Sigsbee exclaimed, “The correspondents were active, energetic and even aggressive in their efforts to get all the news. The people in the U.S. demanded the news, and they got it.”³³ The *New York Journal* had three yachts to take them around Cuba, as well as back and forth to Cuba and Florida: the *Anita*, *Buccaneer*, and *Echo*. They had two artists, Frederic Remington and William Bengough, and many correspondents, including Julian Hawthorne, Karl Decker, George Eugene Bryson, Alfred Henry Lewis, and William E. Lewis. Meanwhile, the *New York World* correspondents were Sylvester Scovel and George Bronson Rea. The *World* owned two dispatch boats, the *Confidence* and *Triton*.³⁴ Lastly, the *New York Herald* was also in Cuba, and had Walter S. Merriweather, Ernest W. McCready, Hamilton Pelt, and Leo L. Redding as its correspondents. Along with the *Journal* and the *World*, the *Herald* also had dispatch boats including the *George Washington Childs*, *Albert F. Dewey*, and *Sommers N. Smith*. There were only two traditional newspapers that covered the explosion in Havana, the *New York Sun* and the

³¹ Hartley Davis, “The Journalism of New York,” *Munsey’s Magazine* 24, no. 2 (November 1900): 233.

³² W.R. Hearst, “\$50,000!,” *New York Journal*, February 19, 1898.

³³ Charles Sigsbee, *The “Maine”: An Account of Her Destruction in Havana harbor* (New York: The Century Co., 1899), 111.

³⁴ Frederick Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (New York: Beekman Publishers, 1974), 122-123.

Chicago Record and Daily News. Together, they combined for one dispatch boat, the *Kanapaha*, and had two correspondents on the island, nowhere near the resources of the big three New York papers.³⁵

Another advantage the yellow press had over the traditional press was the establishment of a regional base in Key West, Florida. The regional headquarters enabled the correspondents in Cuba to minimize travel to report information to their papers' writers. Thus, stories could be written and telegraphed to New York promptly, and printed and circulated faster. According to the assistant editor of the *New York Herald*, William C. Reick, "We obtain and produce the information first."³⁶

While collecting the stories about the *USS Maine* explosion, the yellow press hired divers to get information about the wreck. The yellow newspapers' divers investigated the wreck before the U.S. Navy divers got there. Francis Merriweather reported that, "paper representatives of the *Journal* dragged divers out of their beds [the day after the explosion] and chartered a tug-before noon to go out of the harbor to the wreck."³⁷ The *Journal's* correspondents actually received instructions to use divers to find the cause of the explosion, whether favorable or unfavorable, thus being impartial at least on the surface.³⁸ When the divers returned from the site however, they described and focused on the horrors of seeing many dead sailors, along with alleged evidence of treachery.³⁹

Yellow newspapers introduced illustrations, making news events more graphic and vivid. Most of these pictures, however, were mock-ups, altered to give a desired

³⁵ Ibid, 130-131.

³⁶ William C. Reick, "Maine Investigation," *New York Herald*, February 24, 1898.

³⁷ Walter S. Merriweather, "Divers on Scene," *New York Herald*, February 16, 1898.

³⁸ Bullard, 167.

³⁹ George Eugene Bryson, "Divers Find Maine," *New York Journal*, February 16, 1898.

effect.⁴⁰ The *New York Journal*, for example wanted to arouse public sympathy for the *USS Maine*'s sailors. They used an illustration of what Naval divers saw of the sunken ship: sailors trapped and disfigured, with twisted metal trapping them from any chance of escape.⁴¹ Furthering the *Journal*'s attempt to get public sympathy, this caption accompanied the illustration: "the tangle wreck is itself evidence of the fact that the *USS Maine* was blown up from outside and not by its own magazines."⁴² The New York yellow newspapers were not the only yellow newspapers that used illustrations to enhance and influence reactions. The *Chicago Tribune* printed sensational illustrations of the dead sailors being pulled out of the water, preying on the morbid curiosity of the general public.⁴³ After numerous yellow newspapers, such as the *New York Journal* introduced illustrations into their newspapers, circulation numbers increased by two thousand readers per day; while many traditional newspapers which did not have illustrations, including the *New York Times* lost two hundred readers daily.⁴⁴

Some yellow newspapers used illustrations to promote their theory of an external explosion. An effective illustration in the *Chicago Tribune* showed how an electronic mine could have been placed near a ship, and then detonated to destroy its target from a remote device on shore.⁴⁵ The *New York World* used illustrations to offer a different way explosives could have been used to destroy the *USS Maine*. The *World*'s diagram showed that a "terrorist's" boat during the night could have rounded the starboard side of the *USS Maine* [side with the least amount of lighting] without being seen. Thus, while

⁴⁰ Charles Henry Brown, *The Correspondents' War; journalists in the Spanish American* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 144-160.

⁴¹ "Divers View of Horror in the Battleship Maine," *New York Evening Journal*, February 20, 1898.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "View of the Burning Wreck, The Morning after the explosion," *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1898.

⁴⁴ Davis, 233.

⁴⁵ "Nothing or Explosive Nature," *Chicago Tribune*, February 23, 1898.

passing by, a “terrorist” could throw an explosive device near the *USS Maine* and then detonate it. The story accompanying the diagram stated that one of the crew’s survivors said, “I was on watch on the forward deck shortly before the explosion occurred. While looking over the Maine’s bow into the dark waters of the bay I saw a black object slowly going away from the vessel. I suspected something was wrong, and was about to communicate the fact to an officer when the explosion took place.”⁴⁶

A number of these spectacular illustrations were utilized by the U.S. Navy in its inquiry into the explosion of the *USS Maine*. The *New York Journal* issued a map illustrating the locations of the vessels, *The City of Washington* and *Alfonso XII*, in relation to the *USS Maine* at the time it exploded. The diagram showed that these ships were at a good vantage point, which enabled their crews to witness the event. The map provided great detail showing where the *USS Maine* had sunk, allowing the Navy to compare the Spanish records of the location to theirs; they were able to determine that mines had once been laid near the area.⁴⁷

Other papers offered different descriptions of what happened to the *USS Maine*. An illustration printed by the *New York World* labeled the different compartments of the *USS Maine*, detailing the location of the magazines in the hull. It illustrated in detail that a hull explosion could have taken place directly under the magazines. The picture depicted the size of an explosion that would have resulted from detonated magazines, allowing readers to see that if the magazines did explode, the entire ship would have been in peril.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Sylvester Scovel, “Boat Might Destroy Battleship,” *New York World*, February, 24, 1898.

⁴⁷ “Possible Position of the Maine,” *New York Journal*, February, 19, 1898.

⁴⁸ “Submarine Mine is Placed and Operated,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 1898.

Yellow newspapers' dominance over sources in Cuba enabled them to have better detailed accounts of the disaster than traditional papers. The reports from yellow journalists Sylvester Scovel and Bronson Rea were the first to reach the public: "It is not known whether the explosion occurred on or under the *Maine*. The cause of the ship blowing up will not be known until divers go down to examine the wreck. If their investigation shows the indentation in the hull is inward, the conclusion that a magazine was exploded by a bomb or torpedo placed beneath the vessel is inevitable."⁴⁹ Meanwhile, traditional papers including the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Atlanta Constitution* used the *Sun*'s first telegram, which was not as detailed concerning how the ship had exploded: "Maine has exploded, it is unclear how the ship exploded."⁵⁰ The yellow press had more detailed information concerning mines in Havana Harbor and how the *USS Maine* was moored. The *Washington Star* reported, "Spanish government has reserved a part of the harbor for the anchorage of men-of-war. Every buoy in this anchorage has a corresponding mine-vessel [and the *USS Maine*] is not allowed to anchor for fear of interference with the wires, thus is moored to a buoy number designated by the harbor master."⁵¹ On the other hand, traditional papers had less detailed information; the *New York Evening Post* reported, "The *Maine* was moored to a buoy before explosion, it is believed that no mines were in the area of the *Maine*."⁵²

Besides accounts of the ship's hull and position where it was moored, yellow newspapers had more detailed divers' accounts of the wreck than traditional newspapers. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* stated, "Divers searched, but were hindered by conditions, yet

⁴⁹ Sylvester Scovel, "Maine Explodes," *New York World*, February 17, 1898.

⁵⁰ Identical information can be found in "Maine Destroyed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 18, 1898.; "Maine-Sudden Death," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1898.

⁵¹ "Maine Docked to Mine- Maybe," *Washington Star*, February, 20, 1898.

⁵² "Maine Disaster," *New York Evening Post*, February 19, 1898.

had found some evidence of the possibility of an external explosion.”⁵³ Meanwhile, the *New York Herald* according to Bryson, reported, “Divers found a hole eight inches in diameter-the flanges of the wound bent inward.”⁵⁴ Therefore, with yellow newspapers having more detailed accounts, the American public tended to read the yellow newspapers more than they read traditional newspapers for information.

Along with divers’ accounts, the yellow press also had more detailed information about the inquiry. The *Boston Globe*, a yellow newspaper, reported on February 21, 1898, “Two cases of 10-inch ammunition have been found, the one having exploded, the other full of powder. These were found forward.”⁵⁵ In contrast, the *Los Angeles Times*, a traditional paper, printed the following on the same day: “Naval investigators take another look at the wreckage for clues of what unfolded.”⁵⁶ Apparently the *Globe* had found information about ammunition that the *Times* had not discovered. Thus, having more detailed information about the disaster, gave many readers an incentive to buy yellow newspapers, and also an upper hand to yellow newspapers in their press war with traditional newspapers.

As yellow papers started to have more detailed information about the disaster, many traditional newspapers turned to getting their information from the yellow press. The *New York World* gloated about their supremacy of collecting the news and passing it on to the traditional papers stating, “The facts printed in other newspapers and which were telegraphed all over the country were taken from the *The World*.”⁵⁷ The *New York*

⁵³ “Divers Looking for Cause,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 25, 1898.

⁵⁴ “Proof of Outside Force,” *New York Herald*, February 25, 1898.

⁵⁵ “Court Inspects Wreck,” *Boston Globe*, February 21, 1898.

⁵⁶ “New on the *Maine*,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1898.

⁵⁷ “Only Newspaper to Receive Special Reports of the *Maine* Disaster by Cable,” *New York World*, February, 1898.

Herald made the same claim. Walter S. Merriweather, a *Herald* correspondent, was known as the source of the *Washington Post* article, “Attributed to a Mine.”⁵⁸ The *Los Angeles Times* used the *Herald* as a source, directly printing its stories on the crisis: “The New York Herald this morning prints the following from its Key West correspondent.”⁵⁹ The *Washington Post*, in fact, paid the *Herald* thirty seven cents per story so they could gain access to the *Herald’s* correspondents covering the disaster.⁶⁰ Furthermore, traditional newspapers that could not afford to pay the yellow newspapers for information, including the *New York Evening Post* and the *Chicago Herald*, did not have articles coming from Cuba.⁶¹ Thus, the information they relayed to their readers was not first hand. It was often times obtained from reports by the Navy or other organizations on the scene.⁶²

Numerous traditional newspapers did not receive permission to use information from yellow newspapers; instead they pilfered information and used it in their papers. As William Randolph Hearst exclaimed, “Many papers have taken advantage of the *Journal’s* superior information, without giving it the proper credit it deserves. . . Papers like the *New York Times* would not have nearly as much to print if it was not for papers like the *Journal*.”⁶³ The *New York Times* published a story about officers on board the ship, *City of Washington*, who heard two explosions. The article stated that witnesses heard an explosion, a mine exploding underneath the *USS Maine*, and then heard a

⁵⁸ Walter S. Merriweather, “Attributed to a Mine,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1898.

⁵⁹ “Breaks the Seal of Silence,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1898.

⁶⁰ Miller, 223.

⁶¹ Identical information can be found in *New York Evening Post*, February 1898, March 1898.; *Chicago Herald*, February 1898, March 1898.

⁶² Dicken-Garcia, 254-256.

⁶³ William Randolph Hearst, “Journal Supreme,” *New York Journal*, February 21, 1898.

second explosion, the mine's eruption detonating the ship's magazine compartment.⁶⁴ However, the *New York Journal*, on February 22, 1898, published, "All accounts on board the *City of Washington* agree that there were two explosions in swift succession, one a mine explosion and the next a magazine."⁶⁵ Further stories followed suit, including retired Navy Captain Edmund Zallinski's, an expert on torpedoes, and Navy Admiral Sicard's, who oversaw all naval operations in regards to the *USS Maine*. The *New York Times*, on March 2, 1898, published an article on Captain Zallinski. The article stated that Captain Zallinski examined records of the wreckage, and claimed that a torpedo must have been attached to the hull of the *USS Maine* and then ignited.⁶⁶ Interestingly, the *Los Angeles Times* reported the same exact Zallinski theory story on March 10, 1898.⁶⁷ Regarding Admiral Sicard, the *New York World* published, on February 20, 1898, a story concerning Sicard's orders to begin an inquiry into the explosion and a telegram sent by Captain Sigsbee, the *USS Maine's* captain, after the ship had exploded.⁶⁸ On March 5, 1898, the *New York Times* published a similar account.⁶⁹

Likewise, the Associated Press (AP) found yellow journalists' information to be useful. Most papers in the United States got their information from the AP, and thus got a majority of their information from yellow journalists in the aftermath of the *USS Maine* explosion. The AP only had one correspondent in Cuba, F.J. Higert, which made collecting the full coverage of the *USS Maine* disaster understandably slow. So, Charles Sanford Diehl, in charge of the Cuban coverage for the AP, often asked yellow

⁶⁴ "They Saw the Explosion," *New York Times*, March 10, 1898, 2.

⁶⁵ "Two Explosions One Like a Torpedo," *New York Journal*, February 22, 1898.

⁶⁶ "Expert Zalinski For the World, Finds New Proof That a Torpedo Was Used," *New York World*, March 2, 1898.

⁶⁷ "Zalkinski Says Torpedo," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1898.

⁶⁸ "Admiral Sicard's Report," *New York World*, February 20, 1898.

⁶⁹ "Admiral Sicard's Precept," *New York Times*, March 5, 1898, 5.

newspapers to send him information so the AP could keep other newspapers on top of the situation.⁷⁰ An article by the *Pittsburg Gazette* best illustrates this point: “An AP correspondent received information from the Herald today that the Maine might have been buoyed in an area rigged with mines.”⁷¹

When the AP and traditional newspapers were able to collect and report information about the *USS Maine* explosion, they often had a hard time getting their stories out as the Spanish government enacted press censorship in Cuba. However, yellow journalists found ways to sneak their information out. One way they were able to send information was by utilizing a stolen cable that had already been approved by the Spanish censorship. As AP correspondent F. J. Higert wrote, “We would send our information to Scovel [who worked for the *World*] and he would send our information on a stolen cable blank containing the censor’s stamp of approval, otherwise we warranted Spanish infringement.”⁷² The yellow press also used codes and different forms of word play to sneak information through the censors to their headquarters. Merriweather used poems to get the news out, such as this one describing the disaster:

The strength of twice three thousand horse
That serve the one command;
The hand that heaves the headlong force,
The hate that backs the hand:
The doom-bolt in the darkness freed
The mine that spilts the main;
The white-hot wake, the ‘wilderer speed—
The Choosers of the Slain!⁷³

This poem stated that a mine had destroyed the *USS Maine* and the Spanish were presumed to be at fault.⁷⁴ Captain Charles Sigsbee gave yellow journalist George

⁷⁰ Oliver Gramling, *AP: The Story of News* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1940), 176-182.

⁷¹ “Maine Mined,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 20, 1898.

⁷² Gramling, 186.

⁷³ Walter S. Merriweather, “Maine Destroyed,” *New York Herald*, February 18, 1898.

Bronson Rae his official report of the disaster to send to Washington. Rae carried the dispatch to Key West where he telegraphed it. Rae was selected because Sigsbee believed, “Correspondents [yellow journalists] knew how to get the information out, and they were under strict orders from their papers—more mandatory and difficult execution than those commonly issued in the naval service.”⁷⁵ The traditional press used yellow journalists to get their information out as well. According to a correspondent from the *Miami Herald*, the *Buccaneer* (a *Journal* dispatch boat) frequently brought back *Sun* reporters from Key West enabling them to telegram information and not risk having it censored by Spain.⁷⁶

As yellow newspapers began to dominate the coverage of the *USS Maine*, the traditional press maliciously attacked the yellow press as reporting fake news; however, they reported the same news. The *Chicago Herald* claimed, “These [yellow] papers have become notorious for furnishing fake news. . . Its fakeness has lasted since the beginning of hostilities in Cuba.”⁷⁷ In an article, “No Proof of Sigsbee’s Second Telegram,” published by the *New York Evening Post*, the paper claimed the second telegram sent by Captain Sigsbee regarding a torpedo that had destroyed the *USS Maine* was a fake made up by yellow journalists.⁷⁸ This telegram was printed by many yellow newspapers. However, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a traditional paper, published the report, “The correspondent of the Associated Press has been assured in a reliable quarter that Captain Sigsbee is under the impression that the warship *Maine* was blown, up by a floating

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Sigsbee, 199.

⁷⁶ “Every paper helps in covering the *Maine*,” *Miami Herald*, February 22, 1898.

⁷⁷ Walter Wellman, “Certain newspapers in both the East and West,” *Chicago Herald*, February 19, 1898, 2.

⁷⁸ “No Proof of Sigsbee’s Second Telegram,” *New York Evening Post*, February 22, 1898.

torpedo, which was stated in a telegram sent earlier.”⁷⁹ Thus, if yellow newspapers were faking their information, than so had the traditional newspaper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Another attack made by many traditional newspapers was that yellow newspapers tried to convince the public that the Spanish had orchestrated the explosion, while they covered the disaster. The *Kansas City Star* saw yellow newspapers as trying to persuade the public that Spain was guilty of the disaster. The *Star* reported, “*Journal* and papers like it suppress or create sensational stories to promote their theory of Spanish treachery, with never a shadow of doubt.”⁸⁰ The *New Orleans Times Democrat* also claimed, “news reports [yellow newspapers accounts] concerning the Maine disaster were misleading and deviously planned.”⁸¹ Indeed, many yellow newspapers tended to concentrate on the speculation that a torpedo or a mine had caused the explosion and implied Spain was behind it. The *Chicago Tribune* headlined a report with, “TORPEDO SAYS BELKNAP: Lt. Belknap Thinks the Spanish Attached a Torpedo to the Maine.”⁸² They also used information to refute the internal theory of coal combustion. The *Tribune* explained, “coal temperatures were checked every hour and never was the temperature in critical range, says Lt. Howry.”⁸³

However, the traditional papers were just as guilty of giving slanted views. Many traditional newspapers, like the *Washington Post* tried to convince their readers into thinking the Spanish had no involvement: “A Spanish request to examine the *Maine* has been granted. . . Spanish officials help drag American sailors out of the water all night and save 25 sailors from drowning. . . Spanish wish to help in the investigation of finding

⁷⁹ “Captain Sigsbee Thinks a Torpedo Blew Up the Maine,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 19, 1898.

⁸⁰ “Yellow Criminals,” *Kansas City Star*, February 1898.

⁸¹ “Hearst and Pulitzer are Half Truths,” *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, February 23, 1898.

⁸² “Torpedo Says Belknap,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 22, 1898.

⁸³ “Coal Combustion Theory Refuted,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1898.

the true cause of destruction.”⁸⁴ Many traditional newspapers also tried to sway readers away from yellow newspapers. A writer for the *New York Evening Post*, E.L. Godkin, wrote, “Nothing so disgraceful as the behavior of these 2 Newspapers [*New York Journal* and *New York World*] has ever been known in the history of journalism. . . gross misrepresentation of the facts, deliberate intervention of tales calculated to excite the public and wanton recklessness in construction of headlines.”⁸⁵

Finally, numerous traditional papers claimed that yellow newspapers printed fabricated guesses as to how the explosion happened. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported there were “two kinds of newspapers—those which try to get the news. . . and those which habitually reject the news. . . and then fill their columns with conjectures and guesses.”⁸⁶ However, yellow newspapers’ guesses were not fabrications, but theories made by Navy officers, survivors of the explosion, and other experts. Rear Admiral Lewis A. Kimberly told the *New York Journal*, “A torpedo in the water would have blown up the boat.”⁸⁷ The yellow press published accounts of survivors’ thoughts that a torpedo had exploded the *USS Maine*. Paymaster Bay exclaimed, “there was a strange noise like a torpedo, and then all the sudden the ship shook and was on fire.”⁸⁸

Thus, it is clear that yellow newspapers covered the *USS Maine* explosion more extensively than did the traditional newspapers. This was due to several key factors: Yellow newspapers had more correspondents and resources in place to cover the disaster and fund their reporting. These factors led to yellow newspapers having more detailed accounts of the disaster and its aftermath, in addition to illustrations to explain and

⁸⁴ “A Concurrent Inquiry,”

diagram the explosion. In turn, various traditional newspapers used yellow newspapers as their source of information to keep up with the coverage of the *USS Maine* explosion. Also, in response to the yellow newspapers' dominant coverage of the explosion, numerous traditional newspapers retaliated. They attacked the yellow newspapers, accusing them of providing fake information, trying to convince the public that the Spanish had launched a torpedo or a mine and fabricating guesses of how the explosion happened. Yet, all these unethical tactics that the traditional press complained about were actually utilized by the traditional press as well. Thus, yellow newspapers' dominant coverage of the *USS Maine* explosion actually caused many traditional newspapers to become just like yellow newspapers in their ethics and news writing.

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