Pressure for War

Read how three forces shaped the U.S. decision to fight Spain.

SS24.US2.1a "Explain how yellow journalism, jingoistic sentiments, and economic interests led to American entry into war with Spain."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail showing how newspapers built pressure for war, and circle one detail showing how national pride built pressure for war. Write 1 beside an economic reason to favor intervention and 2 beside an economic reason to fear war.

The Road to War with Spain

1. In February 1898, the U.S. battleship Maine exploded in Havana harbor, killing more than 260 sailors. Investigators at the time disagreed about the cause, and no evidence established that Spain had attacked the ship. Yet some American newspapers treated Spanish guilt as certain. Publishers competing for readers ran dramatic headlines, vivid illustrations, and stories of suffering under Spanish rule in Cuba. This style, called yellow journalism, could make distant events feel immediate and turn anger into demands for action. Reporting on real abuses often appeared alongside claims that went beyond the available evidence.

2. Newspapers did not create American attitudes by themselves. Many Americans already sympathized with Cubans fighting for independence from Spain, especially after hearing about Spanish policies that forced rural Cubans into guarded towns, where many died from disease and hunger. Jingoism, an aggressive form of nationalism favoring war, gave this sympathy a military edge. Some politicians and citizens argued that a strong nation should confront Spain rather than stand aside. After the Maine sank, cries of "Remember the Maine!" joined calls to defend national honor. Such arguments turned sympathy and outrage into political pressure for intervention.

3. Cuba also mattered to U.S. businesses. Americans had invested in Cuban sugar plantations and other enterprises, and unrest disrupted trade. Some investors wanted Washington to restore order and protect property, although other business leaders feared that war itself would damage commerce. President William McKinley initially sought a settlement without war. As fighting continued and public pressure mounted, he asked Congress in April 1898 to authorize intervention in Cuba. Congress approved intervention, and the United States and Spain soon went to war. Economic concerns did not alone cause the decision; they interacted with newspaper coverage, sympathy for Cubans, and demands to defend national honor.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could newspaper coverage of the Maine increase support for war even though Spain's responsibility was not established?

2. How did jingoism change the way some Americans responded to Cuba's struggle for independence?

3. Why could economic interests lead Americans to disagree about going to war?

4. Why might McKinley's search for a peaceful settlement have become harder by April 1898? Connect at least two pressures described in the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence note to a member of Congress deciding whether to authorize intervention in April 1898. Explain how yellow journalism, jingoism, and economic interests might each influence the vote, then end with your judgment about why these pressures do or do not justify war.

ANSWER KEY

Pressure for War

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.1a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail showing how newspapers built pressure for war, and circle one detail showing how national pride built pressure for war. Write 1 beside an economic reason to favor intervention and 2 beside an economic reason to fear war. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could newspaper coverage of the Maine increase support for war even though Spain's responsibility was not established?	**Some newspapers presented Spanish guilt as certain and used dramatic headlines to turn anger about the explosion into demands for action.**
2	How did jingoism change the way some Americans responded to Cuba's struggle for independence?	**It turned sympathy for Cubans into an argument that the United States should confront Spain to defend national honor.**
3	Why could economic interests lead Americans to disagree about going to war?	**Some investors wanted intervention to protect property and restore trade, while other business leaders feared war would damage commerce.**
4	Why might McKinley's search for a peaceful settlement have become harder by April 1898? Connect at least two pressures described in the passage.	**Newspaper coverage increased anger after the Maine exploded, while calls to defend national honor increased pressure for military action. Continued unrest also threatened U.S. investments and trade.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Sensational reports about the Maine could push voters toward war even though Spain's responsibility has not been established. Calls to defend national honor could turn that anger into pressure for military action. Disrupted sugar trade and threatened American investments give lawmakers a separate reason to seek stability, but war could also harm business. I would not vote for war based on these pressures alone without weighing the uncertain evidence and the chance of a peaceful settlement.

Accept different judgments in Part 3 if the note explains all three pressures, addresses whether they justify war, and does not claim that Spain was proven responsible for the Maine explosion.