

# The Yellow Press on the Prairie: South Dakota Daily Newspaper Editorials Prior to the Spanish-American War

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DANIEL SIMUNDSON

During the initial period of its Cuban diplomacy, the United States used its influence to keep the "Ever Faithful Isle" a Spanish possession. Several American statesmen, including Thomas Jefferson, had cast covetous glances toward Cuba, but if the United States could not control the island directly, it preferred dealing with the relatively weak government in Madrid rather than Paris or London. After the Civil War, however, this situation was altered as the national frame of mind changed. No longer the "Ever Faithful Isle," Cuba had become "The Pearl of the Antilles," especially because its strategic location would help to guard any proposed isthmian canal. Furthermore, Americans were looking for new frontiers to compensate for the loss of their own. The generation of 1865 had passed into retirement and their sons grew eager to enact their own kind of dramatic patriotic fervor.

The Cuban revolt of 1895 attracted the attention of a United States eager to intervene. The Cuban patriots were struggling against overwhelming odds, a situation not dissimilar from that of 1776. Although slavery had been abolished in Cuba, its inhabitants were still subject to the capricious authority of the Spanish captain-general and to the selfish utilization of their island. As in most civil insurrections, atrocities were committed by both sides, but the American press was predisposed to overlook those perpetrated by the patriots. While the revolutionists burned fields of cane and

razed homes to make Cuba a liability to Spain, Americans were better informed about the harsh Spanish *reconcentrado* ("mass imprisonment") policy which, understandably, did little to win the hearts of people either in Cuba or the United States.

President Cleveland's reaction to the Cuban revolt was one of benignant neutrality. He proposed that Spain bring peace by granting home rule, a proposition which was indignantly refused. He attempted to protect the rights of American citizens, a measure hardly intended to quench the fire of a burning cane field nor extinguish the clamor for intervention being voiced by senators like Henry Cabot Lodge. When William McKinley succeeded Grover Cleveland on 4 March 1897, he inherited a smoldering problem, which would break out into a conflagration within a year.

Thirteen daily newspapers were published in South Dakota during this period;¹ each of them devoted some editorial space to these developments. From 4 March 1897 when McKinley was inaugurated to 11 April 1898 when he asked Congress for the authority to intervene in Cuba, publishers on the prairie reviewed his diplomatic efforts in terms of its political consequences. Antiadministration editors continually scolded the president for what they considered to be his lack of initiative. Republican editors tried to defend McKinley, but when his peaceful policy became unpopular with the electorate, they withdrew their support. The results were telling. Without the encouragement of a friendly fourth estate, McKinley's efforts to avoid war were doomed, and he could expect little assistance from South Dakota's press corps.

It was widely assumed in the spring of 1897 that McKinley's attitude toward Spain would be more belligerent than Cleveland's had been. Republicans were allegedly as expansionistic as they were tied to the business community, whose investments were supposedly jeopardized by the insurrection. Then too, their party platform of 1896 had supported Cuban independence. Thus, when the new president lauded noninterference in his inaugural address, South Dakota's

Unfortunately, no copies of the Madison Sentinel have been found. The Sioux Falls Dally Press is available at the Sioux Falls public library, and the remaining newspapers are on microfilm at the State Historical Society in Pierre.

Republican newspaper editors, who had predicted a strong Cuban position, responded with apologies. The Sioux Falls Evening Argus-Leader, which was the state's most ardent advocate of the McKinley administration, assured its readers that "an advanced and American policy will be pursued with respect to the little island," while the Aberdeen Daily News indicated that the absence of a strong statement on Cuba meant that the new administration would place the matter on a priority basis. 3

Since the inaugural address was so disappointing, the defiantly confident Republican press turned to another issue. During his last months in office, President Cleveland had been charged with negligence toward American citizens who supposedly were suffering in Cuban jails. With the advent of the new administration, the Republican papers proudly announced a change in the Spanish attitude toward imprisoned Americans. The Black Hills Daily Times, which was published in Deadwood, reported that "only three citizens... are now appealing from Cuban prisons for release." <sup>4</sup> While the Rapid City Daily Journal estimated that there were twelve American prisoners in Cuba, its editor suspected the true nationality of those incarcerated. They did, after all, have names such as "Garcia, Cespedes, Delgrado and Gomez." <sup>5</sup>

Vague and defensive editorials characterized the Republican press during the remainder of 1897. By praising what they hailed as a new program for Cuba and by predicting that it would produce substantial results, the proadministration press became increasingly embarrassed when nothing noteworthy happened. At least forty instances of editorial opinion dealing with McKinley's Cuban policy appeared during the months of March, April, May, and June. On the other hand, less than twenty were written during the last six months of 1897. Although the optimism generated by the Republican papers

- 2. Sioux Falls Evening Argus-Leader, 8 Mar. 1897.
- 3. Aberdeen Daily News, 11 Mar. 1897.

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- 4. Black Hills Daily Times (Deadwood), 10 Apr. 1897.
- 5. Rapid City Daily Journal, 11 Apr. 1897.

became more guarded, they did, with few exceptions, continue to support McKinley's policy of peace. By keeping their editorials vague, they struggled to convey the impression that the president's performance was at least adequate. Typical of this posture was the editor of the *Journal* who wrote that "the Cuban question is the foremost subject in the mind of the President now and there is every reason to believe that the plan which he is developing will not only meet the approval of the American public but be of great value in bringing about an adjustment of the troubles which have so long continued in that unhappy island." <sup>6</sup>

The newspapers supporting McKinley attempted to convey the impression that he was on the brink of taking significant action. Most of the editorials were of necessity vague; some papers, however, ventured specific diplomatic predictions. The Daily Huronite, a Republican organ which was often critical of the administration, at one point expressed the belief that Cuba would eventually be purchased by the United States.8 The Mitchell Republican, which rarely carried editorials dealing with international matters, joined the Journal in believing that McKinley would grant the insurgents belligerent rights, an act which could lead to recognition. The Argus-Leader forecast such a "courageous and progressive" policy that it would ultimately lead to annexation. Furthermore, McKinley would display so much courage that a war with Spain could result. This prospect, however, was "not serious enough to worry over. Spain couldn't whip South Dakota." 9

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 20 June 1897. This editorial was plagiarized by the Aberdeen Daily News on 28 June. Other examples of editorials that praised the administration in a tenuous manner can be found in the following papers: Rapid City Daily Journal, 18 May 1897; Aberdeen Daily News, 2 Apr., 12 May, 18 June 1897, 5 Jan. 1898; Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 12 Apr., 27 May 1897, 22 Jan. 1898; and Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 18 June 1897.

<sup>7.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 31 Mar., 20 May, 26 May, 27 May, 22 Dec. 1897; Aberdeen Daily News, 12 May, 26 May, 18 June 1897; and Black Hills Daily Times, 7 Mar. 1897 contain examples.

<sup>8.</sup> Daily Huronite (Huron), 26 May 1897.

<sup>9.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 19 May 1897.

Meanwhile, the state's antiadministration papers, fewer in number but very aggressive, delighted in exposing what they considered to be McKinley's weak and even cowardly Cuban continually appeared imploring **E** ditorials administration to act in Cuban matters, even though they did not always suggest what action should be taken. This position was especially prevalent in the columns of the Huronite. 10 The most vicious condemnations of McKinley appeared in the Deadwood Independent, which acted as the semiofficial mouthpiece for South Dakota's Populist Congressman, Freeman Knowles. "The friends of Cuba had hoped much from the new administration," moaned the editor of the Independent, "but are now chagrined to find that McKinley's little finger is heavier upon the struggling patriots than was the loin of his Royal Fatness [Grover Cleveland]." 11 Along with another Populist organ, the Sioux Falls Daily Press, the Deadwood newspaper continually charged that McKinley was a pawn at the mercy of Eastern financiers who would lose money if the United States was to intervene. 12 "The dollars of Wall Street are of much more consequence than are the sufferings of the human beings of poor ravaged Cuba," lamented the editor of the Press. 13 Continuing the Populist attack, Congressman Knowles charged that the president was in danger of losing congressional support because "the Republican majority is completely bucked and gagged, but there is every evidence that they would like to have the gag removed. They are growing very restive and it is only a question of time when they will make a break for liberty. Once on their feet, they will not be likely to lie down again to have the gyves put on them."14

Opposition newspaper men were much more willing to

- 10. Daily Huronite, 17 May, 19 May, 22 May, 12 July, 14 Sept., 6 Oct. 1897.
- 11. Deadwood Independent, 16 Apr. 1897.

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- 12. Ibid., 16 Apr., 19 May, 28 May 1897; and Sioux Falls Daily Press, 15 May, 26 May, 10 Dec. 1897, 1 Jan. 1898 contain examples.
  - 13. Sioux Falls Daily Press, 7 Dec. 1897.
  - 14. Deadwood Independent, 17 June 1897.

express alternatives to the McKinley policy of peace than were their Republican colleagues. The editor of the Watertown Daily Public Opinion, an administration paper which divorced itself from McKinlev's Cuban policy early in the year, pointed out that "Spain recognized the belligerency of the south [sic] to seems to us, and she ought not to kick if we recognize the belligerency of Cuba."15 He frequently asserted that it was the duty of the United States to punish Spain for Cuban atrocities. 16 The Huronite also advocated recognizing the insurgents, 17 and the Pierre Daily Capital, which rarely carried editorials dealing with international matters, supported the recognition of Cuban independence. 18 Like many newspapers of a somewhat later era, the Yankton Press and Dakotan, which supported the Populist-Democratic coalition of 1896. consistently pleaded for intervention on the basis that it was America's duty to relieve the suffering of a downtrodden people.<sup>19</sup> The *Press*, meanwhile, pointed out that the admission of Cuba as a state would assure American males of a steady source of good cigars. 20

While these editorials were obviously intended to substantiate political biases, South Dakota's publishers did treat issues that they could agree on. For example, the notorious de Lome letter, a correspondence written by the Spanish minister in Washington, Dupuy de Lome, which criticized McKinley as a selfish politician, aroused nation-wide indignation, which was generally shared by South Dakota columnists. The reaction to this incident, however, was not altogether apolitical. Three newspapers implied that the United States should have taken sterner steps than merely to ask for de Lome's removal. While

- 15. Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 28 May 1897.
- 16. Ibid., 22 May, 23 June, 6 July, 3 Aug., 2 Dec. 1897.
- 17. Daily Huronite, 21 May, 7 Dec. 1897.
- 18. Pierre Daily Capital, 7 May 1897.
- 19. Yankton Press and Dakotan, 10 Apr., 9 Sept. 1897, 17 Jan. 1898 contain examples.
  - 20. Sioux Falls Daily Press, 20 May 1897.



May Soon Come to This The President-Better come in out of the wet, Cuba,

the editor of the *Press* jibed that "no one has appeared on the scene rash enough to assert that De Lome [sic] estimate of McKinley was not a correct one," <sup>21</sup> the states two leading Republican papers were conspicuously silent except for the following doggerel:

Go home, De Lome, Oe'r foam, (a pome).<sup>22</sup>

However, South Dakota newspapers all agreed that Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau was a veritable beast. "Butcher"

21. Ibid., 11 Feb. 1898.

22. Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 14 Feb. 1898.

Weyler had become the governor-general of Cuba in 1896. A career soldier, he was dedicated to the termination of the Cuban insurrection, and, to achieve this end, he had ordered that the people of the Pinar del Rio province should be forced to live in specified areas. This reconcentrado policy was of great propaganda value for the insurgents. American newspapers. especially the sensation-seeking "yellow" journals in New York City, were lashing out not only at the cruelty of Weyler's methods but at the governor-general himself. 23 The South Dakota condemnation was bipartisan, but the Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times and the Aberdeen Daily News were the only two papers whose indignation could match that printed in the East. The editor of the Deadwood paper did not doubt that Weyler delighted in ravaging young girls, clubbing half-starved prisoners, and shooting children while their parents watched.<sup>24</sup> The News asserted that Weyler gloated over "reports of whole villages of starving skeletons praying for death to relieve them of their sufferings."25 In addition, the Huronite reported that 250,000 Cubans were starving as a direct result of the governor-general's reconcentrado policy. 26 This estimate was even higher than the one reported in the New York World.

Statistics such as these indicate to what extent the South Dakota editors were naive concerning the situation in Cuba. Editorials concerning Spain's losses, for example, reveal that the editors were willing to believe obvious exaggerations. While the Spanish force in Cuba never exceeded 200,000, the *Times* reported that 55,000 had deserted to the insurgents. <sup>27</sup> The same newspaper later asserted that 6,000 Spanish troops were

<sup>23.</sup> The distorted and exaggerated coverage of the Cuban revolution, led by William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World, aroused great sympathy for the rebel cause. This type of newspaper reporting became known as "yellow journalism."

<sup>24.</sup> Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 12 Oct. 1897.

<sup>25.</sup> Aberdeen Daily News, 29 Apr. 1897.

<sup>26.</sup> Daily Huronite, 12 Apr. 1898.

<sup>27.</sup> Black Hills Daily Times, 30 Mar. 1897.

dying each day from yellow fever alone, <sup>28</sup> and the *News* declared that 130,000 Spanish soldiers had died, deserted, or been disabled. <sup>29</sup> An even higher estimate appeared in the *Press and Dakotan*. <sup>30</sup>

Figures such as these were undoubtedly sensational, and, although prairie editors wrote emotional editorials like those appearing in other parts of the country, there was a distinct difference in approach between the New York press, for example, and that of South Dakota. While the Hearst and Pulitzer papers were struggling for circulation supremacy, most South Dakota papers were struggling just to survive. They had neither the editorial staff, the inclination, nor the ability to dwell on Cuban sensationalism, especially when state-wide issues often seemed to be more important. This is not to say that at least some publishers in the upper Midwest did not use copy intended to arouse excitement. Although the *Pioneer-Times* referred to "the ascending smoke from Cuban hospitals where helpless heroes are being roasted in hellish torment," <sup>31</sup> such writing was comparatively rare.

Newspapers throughout the United States eagerly awaited McKinley's first annual message, which was sent to Congress on 6 December 1897, because it was anticipated that Cuba would receive considerable attention. The president did dwell at some length on Cuban affairs, but there was to be no change in the American policy of peaceful neutrality. The United States would not send a peace-keeping force to the island, nor would it recognize the insurgents or Cuban independence. Two Black Hills dailies were the only newspapers to be satisfied with the address. The *Journal*, which was conspicuously defensive, argued that McKinley had confidential information which, when it was made public, would substantiate his position. <sup>32</sup>

- 28. Ibid., 29 June 1897.
- 29. Aberdeen Daily News, 11 Nov. 1897.
- 30. Yankton Press and Dakotan, 16 Dec. 1897.
- 31. Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 6 Nov. 1897.
- 32. Rapid City Daily Journal, 9 Dec. 1897.

Other Republican papers reacted with open hostility. Even the editor of the *Argus-Leader* admitted that he had hoped for a more "radical recommendation." <sup>33</sup> In observing that McKinley's position of peace was not supported by the people, the *Public Opinion* called for a more open discussion of the possibilities of war. <sup>34</sup>

President McKinley's first year in office had given South Dakota newspapers little consolation. The Populist press was increasingly condemnatory; Republican papers were uneasy. Thus, when the U.S.S. Maine departed for Cuba, ripples of excitement were created in editorial columns as far away as Yankton and Huron. The editors of the local newspapers there were convinced that the visit of this 6,650-ton battleship was an expression of American goodwill.<sup>35</sup> The *Pioneer-Times* and the Argus-Leader contended that the Maine was being sent to remind Spain that the United States would brook no nonsense in Cuba.<sup>36</sup> While McKinley is president, proudly proclaimed the News, "the dons will be forced to look upon the American flag, just like other folks."37 No Spaniard in Havana was to see the Stars and Stripes for long, however. On 15 February 1898 the Maine was ripped open by an explosion: three weeks later she foundered

The *Maine* incident did not bring forth a spontaneous outburst of accusations against Spain from South Dakota's press. Only one paper, the *Pioneer-Times*, immediately blamed Spain for its destruction.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, at least five dailies entertained the possibility that the ship had sunk by accident. The *News* rebuked metropolitan newspapers for being

- 33. Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 7 Dec. 1897.
- 34. Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 7 Dec. 1897.
- 35. Yankton Press and Dakotan, 11 Feb. 1898; and Daily Huronite, 27 Jan. 1898.
- 36. Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 15 Feb. 1898; and Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 29 Jan. 1898.
  - 37. Aberdeen Daily News, 25 Jan. 1898.
  - 38. Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 17 Feb. 1898.

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It is reported that the managers of the "existing gold standard" party in Yankton have already engaged several scores of men to drive teams on election day. It is possible that some men have been engaged who have no teams. We are glad to hear

THE PRIDE OF THE NAVY GONE

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overly sensational. 39 More specifically, the Pioneer-Times lashed out at the New York Journal's award of \$50,000 to anyone who could offer information as a "vulgar bit of self seeking enterprise masquerading as a public spirit." 40 Under the headline "Let Us Suspend Judgment," the editor of the Journal wondered why more accidents had not taken place aboard such modern, intricate battleships, 41 while the Press and Dakotan praised the helpfulness of Spanish officers in Cuba. 42 Several newspapers indicated that the Maine might have been destroyed by a demented individual who was not employed by Spain. But even if this were true, explained the News and the Pioneer-Times, the Spanish government should not be exonerated because harbor officials in Havana had probably been derelict. The editor of the Lead City Daily Tribune concurred, although he claimed that the United States would have no cause for war if the Maine had been exploded by a fanatic, 43

Washington's response to the catastrophe in Cuba was to appoint a board of inquiry. The *News* sought to allay any indignation until this board made its report. 44 After initially condemning Spain, the editor of the *Pioneer-Times* also argued that "so serious a charge as the . . . blowing up of the Maine should not be made against a friendly government without ample proof." 45 Other dailies, however, did not share this restraint. Between 26 February and 8 March 1898 five newspapers reported that the *Maine* had been destroyed by an exploding mine, and most of these editorials implied that the

- 39. Aberdeen Daily News, 17 Feb. 1898.
- 40. Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 22 Feb. 1898.
- 41. Rapid City Daily Journal, 19 Feb. 1898.
- 42. Yankton Press and Dakotan, 17 Feb. 1898.
- 43. Lead City Daily Tribune, 9 Mar. 1898.
- 44. Aberdeen Daily News, 17 Feb. 1898.
- 45. Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 22 Feb. 1898; and Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times, 20 Feb., 23 Feb., 2 Mar. 1898.

mine had been placed there by the Spanish. <sup>46</sup> By this time the words "submarine" or "torpedo" were becoming synonymous with Spanish guilt. On 23 February the *News* reported that the *Maine* had been destroyed by a Spanish mine; for the first time, evidence was offered to support this claim. According to that newspaper, the destroying force had been external, thus ruling out the possibility of an accident. <sup>47</sup> Other journals now began to associate the destruction of the *Maine* with Spanish treachery. The *Huronite* contended that the mine had come from the Spanish arsenal in Havana, <sup>48</sup> while the *Press* asserted that the mine had been planted by the Spanish government and exploded by Spanish officers. <sup>49</sup>

There can be little doubt that the destruction of the *Maine* was the single most important factor in bringing about the war conciousness of South Dakota publishers. By 1 March six newspapers, including three which had previously supported the president, reported that war with Spain was probable. <sup>50</sup> The editor of the *Public Opinion* not only predicted war, he encouraged it. "If we are to have war with Spain, why not have it now?" <sup>51</sup>

By March 1898 McKinley's Cuban policy was rapidly becoming untenable. He hoped to avoid war, and the activity of the entire administration was engaged to that end. The policy of peace had not only become unpopular, it was politically dangerous. On the prairie the enthusiasm of the proadministration press was eroding rapidly. Although a series

- 47. Aberdeen Daily News, 23 Feb. 1898.
- 48. Daily Huronite, 2 Mar. 1898.
- 49. Sioux Falls Daily Press, 17 Mar. 1898.

<sup>46.</sup> Daily Huronite, 26 Feb. 1898; Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 26 Feb. 1898; Yankton Press and Dakotan, 28 Feb. 1898; Rapid City Daily Journal, 3 Mar. 1898; and Sioux Falls Daily Press, 8 Mar. 1898.

<sup>50.</sup> Rapid City Daily Journal, 19 Feb. 1898; Aberdeen Daily News, 19 Feb., 23 Feb., 24 Feb. 1898; Daily Huronite, 19 Feb., 26 Feb. 1898; Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 21 Feb., 22 Feb., 26 Feb. 1898; Sioux Falls Daily Press, 19 Feb., 1 Mar. 1898; and Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 22 Feb., 25 Feb. 1898.

<sup>51.</sup> Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 22 Feb. 1898.



The Kind of Campaign Uncle Sam is Expected to Make and Make it Ouick, Too.

of supporting editorials appeared in both the *News* and the *Argus-Leader*, they were not as enthusiastic as previous editorials. <sup>52</sup> When the board of inquiry delivered its verdict, which absolved Spain even though it decided that a mine had destroyed the *Maine*, the *Huronite* warned that Americans were losing faith in McKinley's diplomacy and the editor concluded that "if the President has a Cuban policy it is carefully concealed." <sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the opposition press leaped to the offensive. In an editorial entitled "The Country Disgusted," the *Press* complained that "McKinley has practically apologised [sic] for the noise caused by the blowing up of the Maine." <sup>54</sup>

<sup>52.</sup> Aberdeen Daily News, 22 Feb., 23 Feb., 1 Mar., 12 Mar., 29 Mar. 1898; and Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 21 Feb., 26 Feb., 2 Mar., 7 Mar., 24 Mar. 1898.

<sup>53.</sup> Daily Huronite, 30 Mar. 1898.

<sup>54.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Press, 3 Mar. 1898.

Two other dailies in Yankton and Aberdeen reported that the Republicans in Congress were on the verge of rebellion. <sup>55</sup> The *Press* concluded that "the president may make up his mind to one of two things: war with Spain or war with the United States." <sup>56</sup>

Under pressure from Congress and his constituents, McKinley drafted a message that the Argus-Leader somewhat hopefully predicted would "arouse enthusiasm from sea to sea." 57 The Press and Dakotan, on the other hand, more accurately reported that McKinley's speech would lack the fervor "that Jackson would have thrown into such a document." 58 The message, which was read before Congress on 11 April, was tantamount to a declaration of war-with reservations. McKinley asked for the authority to intervene in the Cuban struggle, and, although it was clear that he meant to use force if necessary, his speech contained no vituperative charges against Spain. Indeed, the last two paragraphs referred to an announcement made by Madrid on 10 April that it would suspend all hostilities, a concession which could have at least opened the door to negotiations. The pressure being brought against McKinley, however, was too great, and his feeble reference to the Spanish overture, which was tacked to the message like an afterthought, indicated that he was reconciled to war. The response from South Dakota was predictable. "Betraval" charged the editor of the Press, who gleefully quoted Republican senators disappointed with the speech. 59 The editor of the Public Opinion was dismayed because the president had "failed to sound a definite note," 60 while the

<sup>55.</sup> Yankton Press and Dakotan, 8 Apr. 1898; and Aberdeen Daily News, 29 Mar. 1898.

<sup>56.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Press, 7 Apr. 1898.

<sup>57.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 9 Apr. 1898.

<sup>58.</sup> Yankton Press and Dakotan, 7 Apr. 18.

<sup>59.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Press, 14 Apr., 15 Apr. 1898.

<sup>60.</sup> Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 13 Apr. 1898.

Tribune taunted "there is a caution that at times approaches cowardice." 61

McKinley's cautious policy had made an impression in South Dakota, but the immediate prospect of hostilities brought forth a rash of revealing opinion. The Public Opinion pointed out that war against a common foe would finally reconcile the North and the South, 62 and the Argus-Leader believed that it would bolster the economy.63 Noting that "many a man was made by the war of the rebellion." the Journal suggested that "there are men both young and middle aged who are now doing nothing... that are fast losing their grip on everything. . . . all they need is something to arrest their attention and turn their thoughts in other channels."64 South Dakota editors agreed with the national consensus that the United States would easily defeat Spain. The Huronite promised that American soldiers would "pour death and destruction . . . with such skill and precision" that the Spanish would wonder "whether or not hell is located near the land discovered by Columbus," 65 and the News complained that winning the war would be "too easy to be satisfactory." 66

Finally, the war had arrived, and South Dakota newspapermen reacted with the mass relief that comes only after a protracted period of tension. They had advocated a strong Cuban policy for several reasons, some of which are quite well known. Publishers on the prairie, like those elsewhere, were reflecting the national mood of manifest destiny. The sensationalism of the metropolitan press was undoubtedly influential, but South Dakota's editors were aware of the phoney stories being printed in the yellow journals, and they reacted to the events of 1897 and 1898 with more restraint

- 61. Lead City Daily Tribune, 16 Apr. 1898.
- 62. Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 14 Apr. 1898.
- 63. Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 12 Mar. 1898.
- 64. Rapid City Daily Journal, 6 Apr. 1898.
- 65. Daily Huronite, 5 Apr. 1898.
- 66. Aberdeen Daily News, 24 Feb. 1898.

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than their Eastern brethren. Furthermore, only one paper, the Rapid City Daily Journal, copied out-of-state editorials with any regularity. A far more important reason for agitation of the Cuban issue was that it reflected one phase of the bitter political battle being waged between the state's leading parties. The Populist-Democratic fusion of 1896 was tenuous at best. and the return of prosperity had, especially in 1897, forced the antiadministration press to look for new issues. Although they were supposedly dedicated to antimilitarism and isolationism. the Populists were willing to sacrifice ideology for political expediency. McKinley's peaceful Cuban policy, therefore. served their needs nicely. When the Press, for example, accused "William the Somnolent" of pursuing a "policy of dishonor," it never forgot that the financiers of Wall Street were really to blame. 67 In reply, the Republican editor of the Public Opinion complained that "if there should be a war the Wall Street influence will of course have brought it about in order . . . to oppress the poor; if there should not be a war, it will be because Wall Street can't thereby grind the poor pops down further. . . . The pops are bound to give Wall Street the credit in any event." 68 For its part, the proadministration press was woefully aware that McKinley's position was a liability. To campaign against "free silver" was difficult enough in the Western states and if the Populist-Democratic coalition was to co-opt "free Cuba," the results could be disastrous. Their editorial copy, therefore, expressed an uneasy fear that McKinley would perpetuate his stand indefinitely.

At the turn of the century South Dakota newspapermen tended to interpret the issues of their day in terms of personalities. Editorials dealing with local or state issues carried charges of bribery, corruption, or general malfeasance of office as regularly as the advertising page persuaded South Dakotans to swallow Dr. Sloan's Pink Pills for Pale People. The tendency to deal with personalities manifested itself also on the national level; editors seemed to feel that when it came to the Cuban issue, however, the action of William McKinley was the only

<sup>67.</sup> Sioux Falls Daily Press, 24 Feb., 23 Mar., 30 Mar. 1898.

<sup>68.</sup> Watertown Daily Public Opinion, 23 Mar. 1898.

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activity worthy of press coverage. Seldom is there an editorial referring to other important governmental officials, such as Secretary of State John Sherman, whose encroaching senility, if nothing else, should have deserved some mention. Publishers on the prairie were too predisposed to ridicule or defend McKinley's position and a thoughtful exposure of the issues involved was too infrequent. They failed to recognize that the problems inherent in the Cuban question might have been involved, and that the responsibility for at least some of the decisions made should have been shared by others. When the editor of the Huronite announced that "the press of the country are for Cuba and are anxiously awaiting for President McKinley to act," 69 he seemed to assume that because the Cuban question had been resolved by so esteemed a group, McKinley was personally remiss for not ending the hostilities. If South Dakota's press is to be used as a standard, William McKinley was goaded into declaring war not only by the opposition press, but by the friendly press as well.

69. Daily Huronite, 22 May 1897.

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