

Original Paper

A “Savior of Isolation”: The Interrelationship between American Isolationism and the Idea of “Manifest Destiny” and Its Embodiment in Pre-World War I Diplomacy

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Received: June 6, 2023

Accepted: June 25, 2023

Online Published: July 10, 2023

doi:10.22158/jrph.v6n3p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jrph.v6n3p1>

Abstract

Isolationist ideology made the United States at the beginning of its development more of an island encircled by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans than a New World. However, after the formation of the American nation, “Manifest Destiny” became deeply embedded in the national beliefs based on Protestant culture over time. The former laid the foundation for the American position on internal and external affairs, while the latter determined the way Americans interacted with the outside world. At least until they took center stage on the world stage after World War I, isolation seemed to be the golden rule for Americans. Did “manifest destiny” put an end to isolationism, or did isolationism give rise to “divine destiny”? Or did the two complement each other and finally play a role in specific foreign policy decisions? These are the questions that accompany the history of the establishment and development of the United States and are worth exploring.

Keywords

isolationism, Manifest Destiny, American national identity, American diplomacy.

1. Introduction

Since the founding of the nation, the ideas of “isolationism” and “Manifest Destiny” have subtly influenced the foreign policy decisions of successive U.S. administrations, at least until World War I. This influence has not been broken. However, the U.S.-Mexico War and the U.S.-Western War made the United States of America, which was in the process of opening up its territory, not isolated enough in certain matters, and the “Manifest Destiny” made Americans fervently expand in the New World

with the mission of spreading the “New World Gospel” until the outbreak of World War I. This fervor drove Americans into a world of conflict that rarely ceased in old Europe. By the 1930s, despite a resurgence of isolationism, the outbreak of Pearl Harbor caused the United States to abandon this approach and participate in World War II as an important part of the world. The Cold War period that followed saw the U.S. actively intervene and dominate international affairs, thus confronting the other pole of the world, the Soviet Union, and the unipolar world that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, which wrote “America First” into the contemporary international order. For the creation of the American “pioneer” spirit, an understanding of the two distinct but almost simultaneous ideas of “Manifest Destiny” and “Isolationism” is indispensable. At least until World War I and Wilson’s Fourteen Points of Peace, U.S. diplomatic strategy and internal unity were largely based on a state of both isolation and self-confidence. It is therefore interesting to explore the origins of both ideas and the influence and impact they jointly exerted on American diplomacy before World War I.

2. Origin of “Isolationism” and “Manifest Destiny

There is no doubt that the United States was founded with the intention of creating a modern nation-state on an equal footing with European nations and with full sovereignty. The history of isolationism is “as old as the first British colonization of the North American continent. Before the outbreak of the War of Independence, there was a widespread idea among many people in the North American colonies to cut off ties with the “mother country” of Europe, including, or especially, Britain, in order to pursue a policy of “isolation. This rooted existence also profoundly influenced the founding fathers of the United States, such as Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* in 1776, who suggested that the United States of America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, without the care of European nations. In his view, the United States of America should be free from all the social norms of the European continent, because “the commerce on which she is enriched is a necessity of life, and as long as food is still European In his view, the United States of America should be freed from all the social norms of the European continent, because “the commerce by which she became rich was a necessity of life, and it would always have a market as long as eating remained a European custom”. (“The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe. Europe.”) (Note 1) It can be seen that this idea of “isolation” was formed as early as the founding of the country, and as the most extensive and indispensable market in North America and even for the “mother country” of Europe, Americans could self-reliance without relying on the “mercy” of any country.

As the American nation emerged from colonial rule and gained a foothold in North America, another trend of thought began to form, the ultimate expression of which was the concept of Manifest Destiny coined by literary critic John Louis O’Sullivan in his famous essay *The Great Nation of Futurity*. He believed that America was a nation called and favored by God, and that “all this will be our future history, establishing on earth the moral dignity and salvation of mankind - the truth and mercy of God”

(sic: “All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man-the immutable truth and beneficence of God.”). It is interesting to note that despite the theme of the article being the salvation of the world by the “ordained nation,” the writing and stance is inevitably influenced by isolationism, such as “this tendency to imitate foreign nations is absurd and harmful.” (sic: “This propensity to imitate foreign nations is absurd and injurious.”) In building the rule of law, “they are taught to look abroad for the highest standards of law, judicial wisdom and literary excellence, judicial wisdom, and excellence in literature, but they succumb to the most flattering idolatry of European tastes, sentiments, and prejudices.” (sic: “Taught to look abroad for the highest standards of law, judicial wisdom, and literary excellence, the native sense is subjugated to a most obsequious idolatry of the tastes, sentiments, and prejudices of Europe.”) And while European nations are deeply in debt, American state legislatures are humbly emulating their “harmful” While the European nations were in debt, the legislatures of the American states were humbly imitating their “pernicious” example by pledging the property, labor, and credit of their constituents to the monarchy. And it is through the labor and materials of the American nation itself that the improvements within the United States are instead bound, “We shall be indebted to them, and pay interest, but never become owners.” (sic: “Our State Legislatures, humbly imitating their pernicious example, have pawned, bonded the property, labor, and credit of their It is by our own labor, and with our own materials, that our internal improvements are constructed, but our British-law-trained legislators have enacted that we shall be in debt for them, paying interest, but never to become owners”). The United States must not be allowed to become a vassal of Europe, regardless of its judicial system or economic status; rather, the chosen United States will take upon itself the task of eliminating kings, hierarchies, and oligarchs by noble example, and bringing peace and goodwill to the world (sic: “...smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good...” (Note 2). In short, the meaning of “Manifest Destiny” for America is not just that it exists as a “Christian nation”, but that it - America - is a specifically Christian nation because it is “the divine nation chosen by God for the political salvation of the world,” and O’Sullivan’s text recasts the image of Christ from the orthodox image of the suffering servant, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the Judge of all mankind at the end of time, to the evangelist of American democracy, ultimately bringing The “kingdom of heaven” is brought to earth. (Note 3)

Looking back at the classic embodiment of these two ideas in American writings, it is easy to see that they are both tied to the roaring era of expansion in American history. Isolationism was in its infancy from the moment the British Puritans from across the ocean signed the Mayflower Compact on board. The colonists at this time “voluntarily formed a body of civil government” to “preach the Christian faith to the glory of God” and to preserve “the honor of the king and country”, and thus had to “establish, constitute, and construct such a just and equal system of laws, canons, ordinances, charters, and offices” (sic: “Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country...combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick...And

by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time...” (Note 4). The unwillingness of the United States of America to be a vassal of the others was fated by the consciousness of “forming an independent and united organization”, which led to the establishment of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Federal Constitution, as well as to the justification of violent means of resistance against the patriarchy, such as the resistance against the Stamp Duty, the Boston Tea Party, the War of Independence, and the alliance with France. The isolation that resulted from independence gradually took hold of the new sovereign nation, and the end of isolation often led to self-satisfaction. After the new colonial flood of the Westward Movement and the Gold Rush, the long period of isolated development and the constant influx of immigrants both made the American national character jump across the line between flair and conservatism. This embarrassment was also gradually reflected in the foreign policy of the United States.

3. Specific Manifestations of the Two Ideas in American Foreign Policy-making before World War I

3.1 Erratic Isolationism

As one of the first fundamental ideas born in North America, the idea of isolationism had a profound impact on American diplomacy. The general guidelines of American diplomacy in the early years of the country can be seen in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between The United States and France—for example, Article IV, which reads “The Subjects, People and Inhabitants of the said United States, and each of them, shall not pay in the Ports, Havens Subjects, People and Inhabitants of the said United States, and each of them, shall not pay in the Ports, Havens Roads Isles, Cities & Places under the Domination of his most Christian Majesty in Europe, any other or greater Duties or Imposts, of what Nature soever, they may be, or by what Name soever called , that those which the most favoured Nations are or shall be obliged to pay.” (Note 5) makes it abundantly clear that the United States of America, in its alliance with France, shall pay no taxes of any kind to them under their rule, and that, notwithstanding the alliance between the United States and France, the United States still The United States enjoyed the rights of an independent sovereign nation. This statement actually set the tone for American diplomacy thereafter. In the Federalist Papers, however, Alexander Hamilton argued that by becoming firmly involved in European affairs, Americans “might hope to be forever the arbiter of Europe in America” and to be able to “tilt the competitive balance of Europe in the world according to their own interests” because “the right to neutrality is respected only when power is protected.” (Note 6) Hamilton’s view, in fact, can be interpreted as the United States has long been inscribed in the heart of isolationism, because the prerequisite for such active participation in external things must be to guarantee the strength of the country, and to maintain a peaceful environment for national development and growth, “isolation” is inevitable. Although the United States was active in organizing fleets of ships for global trade at the time of its founding, these activities also led to the young nation’s ongoing

conflicts with British pirates in France and Tripoli off the coast of North Africa, and eventually led to the birth of the U.S. Navy (Note 7). However, the Monroe Declaration soon made this “active” loss of representation.

The Monroe Declaration, or “Monroe Doctrine,” is technically the sum of a series of propositions mentioned by U.S. President James Monroe in his seventh State of the Union Address to Congress on December 2, 1823. It is best known for Monroe’s emphasis on the unique position of the United States in the world, with its central ideas that “any expansion of European power in the American hemisphere would be considered a threat” and that “there is no and there will be no interference with the colonies of the great powers” (sic: “...we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere.”) (Note 8) is widely known. In light of the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the establishment of the Vienna system, which represented a redistribution of power, brought monarchy back into the mainstream in Europe, and the creation of the Holy Alliance further exposed the United States to external pressure from Prussia, Tsarist Russia, Austria, and the Bourbons. This was evident in Latin America, where the Monroe Doctrine provided considerable international support to the Spanish efforts to re-establish and consolidate colonial power in Latin America and to suppress the rise of independence movements. More importantly, Britain, which also pursued “glorious isolation,” strongly supported Monroe’s international claims because of the need to prevent Spanish interests in Latin America. However, because of its weak navy and the scars of the Second War of Independence in 1812, the United States refused to issue a joint declaration on the subject (Note 9). As we can see, isolationism has long acted as a constraint on U.S. diplomacy, and one after another, rigorous and authoritative official documents and historical sources have revealed the image of the early United States as a legacy of independence. But things are always changing, and the changing international situation and the growth of national power have made the United States constantly seek to break out of its isolation in order to seek more benefits on the world stage for the benefit of its own “chosen people”. The “isolation” of the United States was truly shaken by several foreign wars in the 19th century.

3.2 The Heavenly Destiny of Frenzy Supremacy

It is difficult to say where the source of the gradual abandonment of isolation in the United States lies, because the documents and manuscripts mentioned above that support isolationism are in fact implicitly expressing the view that the United States “needs to be at the center”, only the difference lies in whether it is standing in Europe or the world. What is certain is that the idea of destiny, which is on a par with isolationism, has played an important role in the transformation of American diplomatic style. As the originator of the concept, O’Sullivan never imagined that his theory could be used by Americans to justify their own wars against other countries, because he himself did not approve of conquest by force; instead, he believed that gradual settlement was the most appropriate way to proclaim Manifest Destiny, and that under the call of Manifest Destiny, any place where Americans set

foot could join and become a part of the Union part, and would also eventually voluntarily construct a system of government on the model of the United States (Note 10).

O'Sullivan's shallow knowledge of national borders and colonial expansion actually makes his claim of "peaceful settlement" flawed, starting with his inability to explain the outbreak of the Mexican-American War a few years later. This armed conflict, which resulted from a serious diplomatic failure in 1845, reveals the complexity of diplomatic activity. On January 3 of the same year, General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga assumed the presidency of Mexico. He publicly declared that the sovereignty of Texas belonged to Mexico and refused to discuss the U.S. proposal to acquire Alta California and Santa Fé de Nuevo México, much to the chagrin of then U.S. President Polk, who was convinced that war was the only way to resolve the situation. Although the reasons for the declaration of war were far-fetched, in addition to Mexico's non-acceptance of the U.S. territorial acquisition offer, and only the refusal to pay the debts owed to U.S. citizens, Congress continued to pass the president's proposal and eventually put it into practice (Note 11). As can be seen, in the course of the U.S. westward movement, land acquisitions were accompanied not only by dumping deals based on the suzerain state's inability to exercise real control over the original colonies, but also by forceful encroachment on the sovereignty of other countries. When the United States was called by providence to expand the frenzy of settlement got in the way of the Mexicans' similar thirst for territory, the U.S.-Mexico war was doomed to be inevitable. Thus, isolationism seems to be invalidated here, after all, this is the first time after O'Sullivan's "manifest destiny" the United States denied some of his ideas with practical actions.

In a sense, however, the byproduct of this call to "Manifest Destiny" did manifest itself in a significant portion of the American population. Influenced by anti-Catholic Protestant ideology and anti-Mexican racial discrimination, U.S. hostility toward Mexico even spilled over into the Mexican civilian population, and the brutal looting and killing by U.S. Army volunteers left Mexico City's Civilians suffered greatly. Even O'Sullivan himself had to recall, "The regulars regarded the volunteers with importance and contempt ... [The volunteers] robbed Mexicans of their cattle and corn, stole their fences for firewood, got drunk, and killed several inoffensive inhabitants of the town in the streets. town in the streets." (Note 12) Ironically, however, this war was also motivated by the United States of America's "Manifest Destiny" to rule Texas, not to mention that the American sense of "Manifest Destiny" had already been expressed before O'Sullivan's time. The American consciousness of "Manifest Destiny" was already manifested before O'Sullivan. Whether it was the war with Britain and Canada in 1812 before the birth of Manifest Destiny, or the war with Spain in 1898, whether won or lost, the United States of America had already become a fervent nation under the call of Manifest Destiny, and was thus actively involved in international affairs. O'Sullivan only made it ecstatically public in an extremely one-sided and unprofessional manner, and indirectly provided legitimacy for the outbreak of the Texas movement and the further aggression of the United States against Mexico.

4. How Exactly Do the Two Exist in a Complementary Way?

To delve into the diplomatic connections between “Manifest Destiny” and the idea of isolationism, one must look further than specific American diplomatic events to find the fulcrum. Long before O’Sullivan put pen to paper, Americans were convinced that in order to safeguard their hard-won “isolation,” they had to make their presence and expansion known on the international stage, as they did in 1812 when they went to war with Great Britain in order to completely drive out the “old world order” from the New World and went to war actively with Britain. Napoleon was fighting the anti-French alliance on the European continent, and the newly independent United States, out of hatred for its former sovereign, Britain, unsurprisingly favored France in this war. After Britain issued a decree in council to restrict trade with France and Napoleon issued the Milan Decree to counteract it, the U.S. government decided to retaliate through economic sanctions in order to express its displeasure with the belligerents for indirectly impeding U.S. foreign trade, but the main target of its real retaliation was still Britain. This conspicuous diplomatic tilt made the resentment between Britain and the U.S. deepen, coupled with the fact that in order to support the war against France, Britain intensified its plundering in the North American colonies (that is, Canada), which posed a serious threat to the development of trade and commerce in the northwestern U.S. and the high seas, and at this time the U.S. sanctions had paled before Britain, and many in the U.S. domestic press complained about the government’s inability to guard the security of the national borders (Note 13). So in order to prove and maintain the republican superiority, the voice of declaring war on Britain and expelling its power completely from North America grew louder and louder, and the Republican government of the time listened to such voices.

With determination and confidence in the defense of the United States, the United States took the initiative to send troops to fight in Canada, and as for the outcome of the war, the Americans declared themselves the real winners, despite the cost of having the capital occupied by British troops, the White House rebuilt by fire, and even the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war, signed in Belgium, the United States still won peace and security, for which the war deserves the “honorary title” in history. The war deserves the “honorable title” of “Second War of Independence”. They “forgot all about their defeats on land and sea and how close the country was to military defeat and financial collapse” (Note 14). The Americans gained nothing in Canada, neither gaining more territory nor driving out the British colonists, let alone establishing the prestige of the American nation in North America. Although the result was a failure, a glance at history shows that the enthusiasm for spreading the “American model” was clearly a major reason why the United States was able to send its troops beyond its borders. The war was started by sanctions, which stemmed from America’s own support for the affairs of Old Europe (mainly France, the “enemy of the enemy”) and the plundering of the New World by the Old World (mainly Britain, the uncompromising “enemy”), especially since the latter was already taking place blatantly on the borders of the newly formed United States. These preconditions made the United States feel that its “isolation” was threatened, and to counteract this threat it was essential to proclaim

its “superiority” in the continent. The war was not “ordained” (after all, O’Sullivan was not even born in 1812), but it was a war that represented the “preservation and proclamation of the unique self”. “From the moment the U.S. decided to go to war”, it had essentially declared its own “Mandate of Heaven” behind it. In fact, in the long run, the greatest merit of the War of 1812 lies in the fact that it effectively prevented Britain from trying to restore its rule in the United States, and the United States has never suffered from British threats and aggression on its own since then, although the United States lost in terms of the outcome of the war, but strategically it actually preserved the “isolation” of the United States and made Americans more and more This sense was deepened and substantially combined with O’Sullivan’s “Manifest Destiny” after he formally introduced it into the Mexican-American War. This tried-and-true approach did not begin to be discussed until the Monroe Declaration, when the changes it was supposed to make were introduced.

If the War of 1812 was only a sign, and the Mexican-American War of 1846 was the first time that Americans made a formal claim to “Mandate of Heaven,” then the aforementioned Monroe Doctrine was the most extreme expression of the intertwined nature of “Manifest Destiny” and “Isolation”. With Monroe’s seductive declaration, the independence of Latin America seemed to be feasible, and its opposition to Spanish rule in Latin America was justified because of the most prominent and representative precedent in North America, the United States. Such a positive stance was significantly reinforced under President McKinley, and after the outbreak of the Cuban War of Independence in 1895, the desire for U.S. intervention to help the Cuban people fight against the Spanish colonizers gradually spread within the United States, and the far-reaching influence of the Monroe Doctrine began to manifest itself in American society at this time. Of course, the main cause of the ongoing tension between the U.S. and Spain was the huge loss of U.S. commercial interests in Cuba, and the sugar companies that had invested in Cuba pressured the U.S. government to resolve the conflict in order to end the losses (Note 15). In order to alleviate the industrial overproduction caused by rapid domestic development after the Civil War, the United States had to actively seek overseas markets, and the government began to encourage business people not only to take the initiative to expand international trade, but also to high-profile the direct presence of the United States in foreign countries, and to this end Alfred. T. Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt, who was not yet president at the time, advocated the strengthening of the navy and merchant marine, which in fact was responding to the call of Monroe and O’Sullivan (Note 16). The combination of heightened national pride, a rekindled belief in the destiny of God, and the belief that the United States should take its place among the shapers of world affairs made it urgent for the United States to respond to the Cuban revolution instead. Finally, with the sinking of the Maine as a trigger, and with public opinion ignited and all sectors of society frantically pressuring the McKinley government, the United States officially declared war on Spain in order to achieve and protect the liberation of Latin America, and to prove that the speech Monroe made in Congress that year was not just empty talk.

Compared to the War of 1812, the Spanish-American War was a great success for the United States, both in terms of its outcome and its long-term effects, as the United States seized the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Mariana Islands from Spain and became a protectorate of Cuba under the Treaty of Paris (Note 17). This opened up the U.S. sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific and allowed the United States to fight for a place in the colonial wars that were in full swing in the 19th century. The war also signaled the United States' entry into the international arena as a prominent player. The image of the U.S. as "liberator" and "defender" began to take hold in Cuba and throughout Latin America, while Spain had to anxiously address the social problems directly caused by its defeat, as the "old empire", which had already lost its power in the world, continued to be a part of the world. The "old empire" continued to sink until the complete liberation of Latin America. Once again, the United States saved itself from "isolation" with a "manifest destiny", and even extended the reach of this "isolation" to the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Is such "isolation" still considered isolation? History gave the final answer at the time of World War I - it was no longer isolation after all, but at this moment, at the end of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. was truly a combination of fanatical "Manifest Destiny" and pragmatic "isolation. In 1812 the United States had only the British as its enemy, because it wanted to secure its borders, while in 1898 it had only Spain as its enemy, because it wanted to secure its borders as far as the Mandate of Heaven could reach. The purpose of isolation was security, and the United States chose to use "Manifest Destiny" to lead itself to security, only to win security as the United States began to slowly emerge from isolation.

The moment of the signing of the contract in Paris on December 10, 1898 was the best point of balance between "Manifest Destiny" and "Isolation" for the U.S. abroad, and after that, the scales would increasingly tip in favor of "Manifest Destiny. After that, the balance would increasingly tip in favor of "Manifest Destiny".

5. Result and Discussion

Isolationism and Manifest Destiny, two of the most important expressions of the American national character, influenced its diplomatic activities from the earliest days of the nation. These two have long served as the two ends of the scale, with isolationism being the one that initially carried the most weight. The idea of "Manifest Destiny" was added to from the time it first took shape to the moment O'Sullivan formally made "Manifest Destiny" public. After the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the Spanish-American War, the weight of "Manifest Destiny" finally became equal to that of "Isolation," which then began to dominate American diplomacy. The United States became increasingly active in international affairs until World War I, when it became the backbone of the effort to end the war.

The quest for American isolation relative to Europe had been expressed through the writings of the Founding Fathers since the very beginning of the United States, and arguably even before its establishment. But the manuscripts of both Thomas Paine and Alexander Hamilton (especially the latter)

coincided in expressing the need for the United States to grow in strength while maintaining its independence, so as to establish its identity and position on the European continent as much as possible while preserving itself, in order to “lean” in European affairs. This idea was gradually reinforced and strengthened in the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War of 1845, and the image of “isolated savior” was gradually shaped by O’Sullivan’s “The Mandate of Heaven”, which was a comprehensive literary expression. The image of the “isolated messiah” exists as both the “Mandate of Heaven” and the “isolation”. Eventually, when the weight of “Manifest Destiny” increased to the same level as “isolation”, the Spanish-American War under the influence of the Monroe Declaration brought the balance of American diplomacy to the extreme, but also represented the imminent abandonment of American isolation by the time of World War I. By the time of World War I, the weight of “isolation” had been thrown clean off the scales. Although isolationism left a little residual heat in the 1930s, but this tiny flame was completely extinguished after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The United States thus stepped into the spotlight of the era, on an equal footing with the Soviet Union, China, and a host of other countries in old Europe. Today, after the end of the Cold War, the United States is no longer an isolated country, but the sole leader of a unilateral hegemonic system and the defender of the existing international system. The new challenge for the “Columbia” is to hold on to the defense of her faith in the “Manifest Destiny” in the face of China’s rise.

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Note

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- Note 6. Sic: "By a steady adherence to the Union we may hope, ere long, to become the arbiter of Europe in America, and to be able to incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world as our interest may dictate" and "The rights of neutrality will only be respected when they are defended by an adequate power". From Hamilton, A., Madison, J., & Jay, J. (2008). *The federalist papers*. Oxford University Press, p. 76.
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Note 13. Hickey, D. R. (2012). The War of 1812: A forgotten conflict. University of Illinois Press. p. 25.

Note 14. The same as Note 13. p.316.

Note 15. Even the whole trade with Cuba had dropped by more than two thirds from a high of US\$100 million. from Offner, J. L. (2004). McKinley and the Spanish-American War. Presidential Studies Quarterly, 34(1), 50-61. p. 51.

Note 16. Gould, L. L. (1982). The Spanish-American War and President McKinley. University Press of Kansas. p. 24.

Note 17. A Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain, U.S. Congress, 55th Cong., 3d sess. From Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain; December 10, 1898. Art 1, Art 2, Art 3. From Lillian Goldman Law Library. Library. Yale Law School. Web: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/sp1898.asp. Landed on June 23, 2023.