

“You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.”

The true story of William Randolph Hearst’s 1897 cable to Frederic Remington



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“You go after the story and pictures,” they told [Richard Harding Davis]; “we’ll furnish the war.” If they didn’t absolutely bring on the Spanish-American War, they sure furnished it at that dinner. Somehow I’ve always believed that was the way it happened.

Hedda Hopper, “Hedda Tells of San Simeon’s Wonders” (1952)

Hearst later privately denied that his telegram [to Frederic Remington] was couched in the epigrammatic form quoted.

John K. Winkler, *William Randolph Hearst: A New Appraisal* (1955)

In his book *On the Great Highway: The Wanderings and Adventures of a Special Correspondent*, James Creelman wrote:

Some time before the destruction of the battleship *Maine* in the harbor of Havana, the *New York Journal* sent Frederic Remington, the distinguished artist, to Cuba. He was instructed to remain there until the war began; for “yellow journalism” had an eye for the future.

Presently Mr. Remington sent this telegram from Havana:—

“W.R. Hearst, *New York Journal*, N.Y.:

“Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return.
“Remington.”

This was the reply:—

“REMINGTON, HAVANA:

“Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.

“W.R. HEARST.”

The proprietor of the *Journal* was true to his word, and to-day the gilded arms of Spain, torn from the front of the palace in Santiago de Cuba, hang in his office in Printing House Square, a lump of melted silver, taken from the smoking deck of the shattered Spanish flagship, serves as his paper weight, and the bullet-pierced headquarters flag of the Eastern army of Cuba—gratefully presented to him in the field by General Garcia—adorns his wall.

By the time he wrote the book, Creelman had been a correspondent for the *New York Journal* and the *San Francisco Examiner* for half a decade. He was by then William Randolph Hearst’s most dependable, most trustworthy, most trusted reporter.

Creelman’s subjects in this excerpt—Hearst and Remington—were prominent public men of the day. There is no reason to doubt that he reported the anecdote as Hearst had related it to him. But, like other true stories, it might have improved with age as Hearst retold it.

(Hearst might have cadged his “furnish . . . pictures/furnish . . . war” couplet. Referring to a different conflict brewing afar, the August 31, 1897, *Evening Journal* of Wilmington, Delaware, had quipped: “If the Ameer of Afghanistan proclaims a holy war, he will find that he will furnish the war and that British bullets will furnish the holies.”)

Unless fresh documentation turns up in the future, there’s no way to know whether the clause that claimed Remington “was instructed to remain there until the war began” represented Creelman’s mistaken presumption or Hearst’s rhetorical flourish. Either way, it conflated or exaggerated Hearst’s assignment to Remington, but not implausibly in the context of the time. Hearst might have asked Remington to stay longer than the previously agreed term because his reporter and illustrator had failed to rendezvous with Cuban insurgents as originally planned.

Creelman’s book was published in October 1901. In interviews published three months earlier he had included the story about Hearst’s telegram to Remington. His publisher’s advance publicity alluded to it.

Several of the book’s mostly positive reviewers quoted parts of the passage or mentioned it. A long November 24 review by Max O’Rell (Léon Paul Blouet) in Hearst’s *Examiner* did not refer to it specifically, but concluded, “I took the book and never laid it aside until I had finished it. In my mind it is a book to be read and re-read, a book to keep in the library; truthful, manly, thrilling, instructive, and, above all—what a book of this sort should be—honest.”

No contemporaneous reports that I have read raised doubts about Creelman’s veracity, though some poked fun at his vanity. Yet in recent years a small but stubborn cohort of critics has condemned his account of the Remington-Hearst exchange as a fabrication, and has maligned writers who told the story straight. My objective here is to retrieve the kernel of truth from the chaff of denialist deception, mischief, and misdirection.

There was more to the episode than Creelman included in his tightly composed narrative, probably more than he knew. His and a colleague’s expulsion from Havana in May 1896 had prompted Hearst to send a new team to cover the continuing story of the Cuban insurgency, which the Spanish authorities were trying to quell, while he dispatched Creelman to Madrid to cover the story from that end.

Hearst’s aim was to arouse public sentiment for a war against Spain and a U.S. military expedition to Cuba. His initial attempt fell short, but it contributed to the nationwide war fever that prevailed after a powerful explosion sank the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898, killing 266 U.S. Navy men.

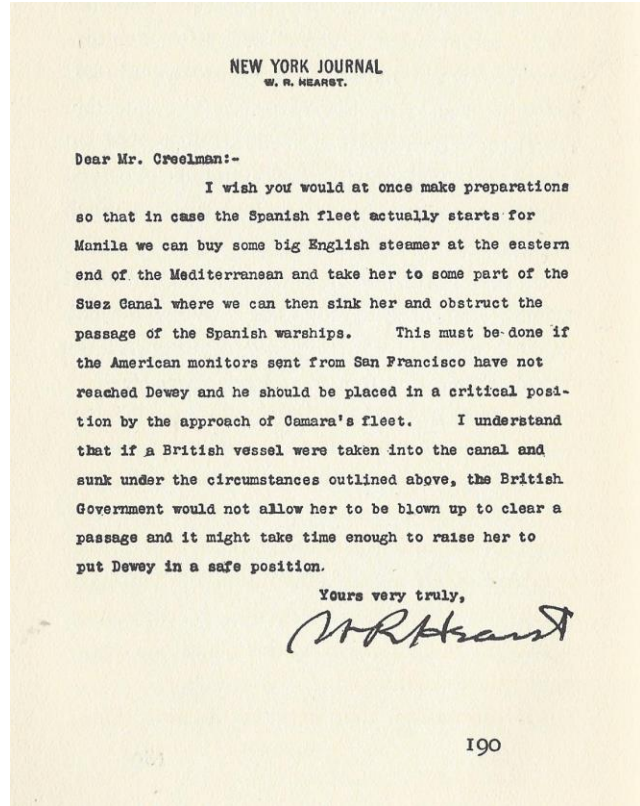
The telegram’s promise to “furnish the war” was consistent with Hearst’s editorial policy from 1896 to 1898. For the rest of his life, Hearst took pride in that pledge and his role in fulfilling it, even though in other respects his political views changed dramatically over the course of his long career.

Hearst letter: Buy a steamship and sink it in the Suez Canal to block the Spanish fleet

Ten pages farther on, Creelman reported a bolder interventionist instruction from Hearst, more outlandish than the telegram to Remington, this time in a letter to Creelman himself. Lest he be disbelieved, Creelman graphically reproduced the original document signed by Hearst. He wrote:

I have seen Admiral Dewey's letters to Consul General Wildman at Hong Kong, begging for news of the movements of the Spanish fleet and confessing that his squadron was too weak [after his May 1898 victory at Manila Bay] to meet it unless the two monitors should arrive in time [from San Francisco]. The threatened admiral made no secret of his anxiety. The question of victory or defeat or retreat depended on whether the Spanish fleet could be delayed until the powerful monitors had time to reach Manila.

In that critical hour [in June 1898], when the statesmen at Washington were denouncing "yellow journalism," I received the following message in the London office of the *New York Journal*:-



NEW YORK JOURNAL W.R. HEARST

Dear Mr. Creelman:-

I wish you would at once make preparations so that in case the Spanish fleet actually starts for Manila we can buy some big English steamer at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and take her to some part of the Suez Canal where we can then sink her and obstruct the passage of Spanish warships. This must be done if the American monitors sent from San Francisco have not reached Dewey and he should be placed in a critical position by the approach of Camara's fleet. I understand that if a British vessel were taken into the canal and sunk under the circumstances outlined above, the British Government would not allow her to be blown up to clear a passage and it might take time enough to raise her to put Dewey in a safe position.

Yours Very Truly,
W.R. Hearst

Camara's fleet left Spain and actually entered the Suez Canal; but the sinking of a steamer in the narrow channel was made unnecessary by the sudden abandonment of the expedition and the return of the admiral to the threatened coast of Spain.

Compared to this fantastic request to Creelman, Hearst's appeal to Remington a year and a half earlier—to wait in Havana for the arrival of an American expeditionary force that Hearst's fiery headlines were imploring Washington to send—manifested moderation.

Prelude: Creelman and Lawrence's expulsion from Cuba

On May 6, 1896, the Spanish colonial government in Havana ordered two veteran war correspondents—Creelman of the *New York World* and Frederick W. Lawrence of the *New York Journal* and the *San Francisco Examiner*—to leave Cuba on the next available steamer.

The two reporters had flouted Spanish Governor-General Valeriano Weyler's April 28 decree that forbade publishing articles about the Cuban war for independence from Spain without prior approval. They had portrayed the insurgent commanders of anti-Spanish guerrilla forces—Antonio Maceo, Calixto García, and Máximo Gómez—as heroes.

The expulsion order accused Creelman and Lawrence of

... sending to their papers false news upon the present rebel movement—forging rebel victories and defeats for the army, as delusive, the one as the other; charging the authorities and chiefs of columns with acts of cruelty which have not been committed, and asserting that the war will have a fatal result to the Spanish cause, which plainly encourages the Separatist party and diverts the public opinion in the country where their newspapers circulate.

Their stories from Cuba, cabled April 30 via Key West to evade Spanish censorship, provoked Weyler's reprisal. Lawrence had reported from Campo Florido east of Havana,

... almost incredible crimes, committed by Spanish troops and recorded as victories.

The highway leading from this district to Guanabacoa is crowded with fugitives in ox carts and on foot, principally women and children. They report almost daily murders by the Spanish soldiers.

The night before last fourteen inoffensive men were tied up and shot just outside Guanabacoa. Their neighbors were helpless to save them.

Those who had fled to the Cuban ranks for protection were led by the rebel chief, Valencia, to Balondron, in the province of Matanzas, and will join the forces under Gomez.

Several unarmed peasants were shot without trial at Guanabo, near Campo Florido, six or seven days ago, and the soldiers did not take the trouble even to bury them. I have talked with a farmer who saw dogs and vultures eating the bodies.



Creelman's report in the *World* had cast Weyler in a more virtuous light, but as a man who could not control his subordinates:

It cannot be possible that Gen. Weyler knows the facts. He seems to be a brave and intelligent officer, and he has won his high place by brains and energy.

With the heavy responsibility of the war resting on him, he could have no intelligible reason for ordering barbarities which swell the ranks of the insurgents by thousands and drive hundreds of old men, women, and children into the larger towns and cities to be a burden the government. I prefer to believe that the Captain-General has been deceived by officers in the field, who are killing non-combatants indiscriminately and reporting victorious engagements with insurgent troops. . . .

If Mr. Cleveland could have heard the terrified Cuban women trooping with their children into Guanabacoa yesterday asking me if the United States would allow Spain to slay the whole population their appeals might not have been in vain.

Both reporters and their papers' owners—Joseph Pulitzer of the *World* and Hearst of the *Journal* and the *Examiner*—sympathized with Cuban nationalist insurgents. Pulitzer and Hearst declared that their men had been expelled for publishing the truth about the war; they vowed to continue gathering and reporting the news from Cuba by other means.

Calls for U.S. intervention in Cuba

President Grover Cleveland resisted pressure from the press and from hawkish members of Congress to intervene militarily in Cuba, but he did not seek re-election. In June 1896, at the request of pro-intervention U.S. Senator Joseph B. Foraker of Ohio, Creelman drafted this proposed plank for the Republican platform:

The government of Spain having lost control over Cuba and being unable to protect the property or lives of American citizens or to comply with its treaty obligations, we demand that the armed force of the United States shall be promptly interposed to restore peace on the island. We hold it to be necessary to our national peace and prosperity that the people of Cuba shall achieve political independence and we pledge to give them our sympathy in their noble struggle against the corrupt and barbarous Spanish monarchy.

At the convention, Frederick Dent Grant, son of the former president and Civil War general, waved the revolutionary flag of Cuba that insurgents had presented to Creelman. The party adopted a watered-down policy statement on Cuba, which in any case proved to be of marginal importance in a contest between the gold-standard Republican William McKinley and the free-silver Democrat-Populist William Jennings Bryan.

Creelman and Hearst supported Bryan for president, but whether McKinley or Bryan won, the election outcome would offer a fresh target for editorial agitation after March 4, 1897. Hearst did not wait for McKinley to be inaugurated before launching his campaign for U.S. military intervention in Cuba. In mid-December 1896 he sent these questions to the governors of every state:

“Do you favor such interference in the Cuban revolution, by recognition or material aid, as would promote the war for independence? How many volunteers in your judgment would your state furnish for land and sea forces respectively, in case of war with a foreign power?”

By December 18 the *Examiner* and the *Journal* had received replies from 26 governors, “the majority of whom strongly favored interference by the United States on behalf of the insurgents.” According to the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, “Such leaders as Governor Hastings, of Pennsylvania, Matthews of Indiana, Morrill of Kansas, Budd of California and a score of other

governors favored immediate intervention”; 12 states said they could send “at short notice” at least 81,500 men.

With more than a century of history and hindsight to obscure and muddle our grasp of the Cuban conflict as it appeared to Hearst in 1896 and 1897, it seems incredible today that he believed he could mobilize sufficient popular war fever in a matter of weeks to cajole Congress into declaring war on Spain, and that thousands of armed American volunteers would invade Cuba. But those were Hearst’s calculations. He spent a fortune to advance them.

Hearst’s assignments to Creelman, Davis, and Remington

Hearst assembled an aggressive team in anticipation of his next opportunity. He recruited Creelman away from Pulitzer’s *World* to report from Spain for the *Journal* and the *Examiner*. He dispatched writer Richard Harding Davis and artist Frederic Remington to Havana to report on and send pictures of the conflict in Cuba.

Cleveland’s final message to Congress, delivered December 5, had included a lengthy section on U.S. policy concerning Cuba, restating his wish for a peaceful path to independence, but concluding with an implicit threat of intervention:

Whatever circumstances may arise, our policy and our interests would constrain us to object to the acquisition of the island or an interference with its control by any other power.

It should be added that it cannot be reasonably assumed that the hitherto expectant attitude of the United States will be indefinitely maintained. While we are anxious to accord all due respect to the sovereignty of Spain, we cannot view the pending conflict in all its features and properly apprehend our inevitably close relations to it and its possible results without considering that, by the course of events, we may be drawn into such an unusual and unprecedented condition as will fix a limit to our patient waiting for Spain to end the contest, either alone and in her own way or with our friendly cooperation.

When the inability of Spain to deal successfully with the insurrection has become manifest, and it is demonstrated that her sovereignty is extinct in Cuba for all purposes of its rightful existence, and when a hopeless struggle for its reestablishment has degenerated into a strife which means nothing more than the useless sacrifice of human life and the utter destruction of the very subject matter of the conflict, a situation will be presented in which our obligations to the sovereignty of Spain will be superseded by higher obligations, which we can hardly hesitate to recognize and discharge.

The front page of the December 19 *Examiner* headlined Creelman’s interview with Spanish prime minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, titled “SPAIN DOES NOT FEAR WAR,” which translated and quoted Cánovas’s reply to Cleveland:

“. . . I repeat that a generous measure of local self-government will be established in Cuba when the military situation in that island is such that the Spanish Government can freely exercise its discretion, without giving any opportunity for the accusation that it acts upon compulsion.

“We will not swerve in the slightest degree from that policy, no matter what may come. We believe that the campaign in Cuba is progressing favorably for our arms. The death of Maceo is a substantial victory, for it removes from the insurgent forces the most valiant and aggressive Captain and the leader of that party which is most bitterly opposed to reconciliation with the mother country on any terms.

“The negro insurgents, who are in the majority, have lost their one able man. It is true that Maximo Gomez still remains in command of the rebellion, but he is a white man, and a foreigner cannot exercise the influence possessed by Maceo. . . .”

The *Examiner*'s December 27 front page featured a large portrait captioned "JAMES CREELMAN, WAR CORRESPONDENT. The 'Examiner-Journal's' Special Commissioner in Spain, whose interview with Senor Canovas, the Spanish Prime Minister, cabled from Madrid, set before the American people for the first time a succinct and thorough exposition of the intentions, hopes and views of the Spanish Government respecting Cuba and the attitude of the United States toward the insurgents."

Creelman's adjacent dispatch began, "After having talked with the foremost Spanish statesmen of all parties, I am satisfied that, unless the United States promptly solves the Cuban question the Spanish monarchy is doomed." As a talented yellow-journalism virtuoso, he took a jab at Hearst's competitors and adversaries:

Articles copied from unpatriotic American newspapers are printed broadcast in Spain every day, with the hope to convince the Spanish leaders that there is no real sentiment in the United States for Cuban independence, that the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations is made up of nincompoops and demagogues, that Congress itself is an ignorant and desperately foolish body, and that Mr. Cleveland and Secretary [of State Richard] Olney, who were openly repudiated by the Democratic National Convention, are the only wise and patriotic men in the country.

The front page of the next morning's *Examiner*, emblazoned with a Cuban flag, led with Creelman's article beneath the banner headline, "THE STRUGGLE TO FREE FAITHFUL CUBA." Similar dispatches received comparable treatment over the next week. Referring to those reports in a January 2 editorial that excoriated the lame-duck Cleveland administration's diplomatic posture toward Spain, Hearst concluded, "Although Congress cannot make a treaty, nor, according to Mr. Olney, even order the recognition of a new government, nobody has yet denied its power to declare war."

His purpose was plain to see: to sway public opinion in support of U.S. military intervention. He had sent Davis and Remington to Cuba to provide similarly provocative news reports and pictures from there, but that part of his scheme had gone awry.

Davis and Remington in Cuba

The plan called for Davis and Remington to sneak into Cuba before Christmas 1896, transported on Hearst's speedy steam-powered yacht *Vamoose*, and be set ashore surreptitiously. They were to make their way to Gómez's headquarters and to spend a month with the insurgents. *Vamoose* would return each week to collect Davis's reports and Remington's sketches; and would bring the men home on the fourth weekly pickup trip.

After nearly two weeks had passed while they waited at Key West for the *Vamoose* crew to take them, thwarted once by a strike of the crew and three times by winter storms, Davis and Remington gave up on that plan and sailed to Havana on the *Olivette*, a commercial liner, debarking there January 9, 1897. By then they had no way to reach Gómez's headquarters located near Santa Clara in central Cuba, about 175 miles east of Havana.

Weyler, the Spanish governor and military commander, issued passes that granted Davis and Remington permission to travel to any fortified place outside Havana. Roving the nearby countryside, they saw the consequences of skirmishes between insurgent guerrillas and the Spanish army, but they did not encounter any actual fighting. They did document cruel attacks on civilians by Spanish soldiers and mercenaries. They got as far east as Matanzas, 65 miles from Havana before turning back.

Witnesses told them stories of atrocities perpetrated by soldiers, including massacres of unarmed civilians. On January 15, Remington sketched a picture of a man and a woman, tethered and “trussed up” at the elbows, being led to captivity by mounted Spanish irregular “guerrillas.”

In a January 16 scene, a lone Cuban insurgent took a potshot at a Spanish fortress, which prompted “a fusillade of Mausers reply.” On January 17 Remington drew a picture of a Spanish cavalry scouting party.



Remington and Davis had observed gruesome sights, but not war. David Nasaw wrote in his 2000 biography, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*:

In mid-January, the Journal reported triumphantly that its representatives had caught up with the insurgent Cuban army. Davis was outraged. As he had written his mother a few days earlier, not only had he not found any army in the field, he had in his entire time in Cuba not “heard a shot fired or seen an insurgent. . . . I am just ‘not in it’ and I am torn between coming home and making your dear heart stop worrying and getting one story to justify me being here and that damn silly page of the Journal’s . . . All Hearst wants is my name and I will give him that only if it will be signed to a different sort of story from those they have been printing.”

While Davis never did find any fighting, he was able to find enough material to write a few magnificent front-page stories on the devastation the war had visited on Cuba and its peoples. Frederic Remington was not so fortunate. Disgusted by the lack of action and his inability to find scenes worth illustrating, he telegraphed Hearst from Havana that he wished to return to New York.

With no possibility of visiting a rebel stronghold, Remington had gathered as much useful material in his portfolio as he was likely to get. He was ready to leave. Being aware that his cable to Hearst would be read by Weyler’s censors, he could not write about the disappointing reality of the insurgents’ war. If he had mentioned his sketches, the military authorities might have confiscated them.

So instead he telegraphed what he knew would pass their examination, trusting Hearst to read between his transparently fanciful lines: “Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return. Remington.” At the time he received it, Hearst could not have guessed that 15 months would pass before Congress would declare war. He probably hoped that the war his papers advocated—between the armed forces of Spain and the United States—was imminent, encouraged by Creelman’s dispatches from Madrid.

Hearst’s famous reply, “Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war,” reflected that prospect, although that probably had not been his exact choice of words. Without further documentation it isn’t possible to know whether censors intercepted Hearst’s inbound

cable or, if it slipped past them, whether Remington received it. He might have departed before it reached Havana. (It is doubtful that Spain's anglophone censors in Havana examined much if any incoming traffic. They had their hands full intercepting, reading, translating, and expurgating or confiscating as much outbound cable traffic and letter mail as possible.)

Upon his return, Remington confirmed the essence of what Creelman and Lawrence had reported previously. In a letter quoted by his biographers, Peggy and Harold Samuels, he wrote to journalist Poultney Bigelow, "Just Home from Cuba—saw more hell there than I ever read about.—small pox—typhus—yellowjack—dishonesty—suffering beyond measure—Davis will tell & I will draw but cant do much in a Yellow Kid Journal—printing too bad." His wife Eva added, "I had no picnic while my massive husband was with those civilized fiends in Cuba who care no more for a man's life than they do for so many rats."

Ben Merchant Vorpahl's 1972 book, *My Dear Wister: The Frederic Remington – Owen Lister Letters*, reveals Remington's private opinions as he expressed them to his friend best known as the author of the original Western novel, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*. Remington did not share Hearst's and Davis's sympathy for the Cuban insurgents, but he did agree with their enthusiasm for a war against Spain.

"Remington first mentioned war to Wister in November 1895," wrote Vorpahl. "This, however, was before Remington began to regard the war both as a lark and a business opportunity." In an April 1897 letter he urged Wister to join the adventure:

I expect you will see a big war with Spain over here and will want to come back—and see some more friends die. *Cuba libre*. It does seem tough that so many Americans have had to be and still have to be killed to free a lot of d— niggers who are better off under the yoke. There is something fearfull in our destiny that way. This time however we will kill a few Spaniards instead of Anglo-Saxons, which will be nice. Still, Wister, you can count the fellows on your fingers and toes who will go under in disease—friends of yours.

Regarding the telegram, Vorpahl wrote, "Whether or not Hearst actually sent the wire, he did do everything he could to keep the peace from coming—and Remington helped him."

Davis had stayed behind in Cuba for the month of his contract commitment. He filed his first report from Tampa datelined February 11, headlined "Savagery of Spaniards" on the front page of the next morning's *Examiner*. He delivered Hearst's message with dramatic flair:

Before I went to Cuba I was as much opposed to our interfering there as was any other person ignorant concerning the situation, but since I have seen for myself I feel ashamed that we should have stood so long idle. We have been too considerate, too fearful that as a younger nation we should appear to disregard the laws laid down by the older nations. We have tolerated what no European power would have tolerated; we have been patient with men who have put back the hand of time for centuries, who lie to our representatives daily, who butcher innocent people, who gamble with the lives of their own soldiers in order to gain a few more stars and an extra stripe; who murder prisoners of war, and who send American property to air in flames.

Under the subhead "Sufficient Reasons for Intervention," Davis wrote:

But why not go still further and step higher, and interfere in the name of humanity? Not because we are Americans, but because we are human beings, and because within eighty miles of our coast Spanish officials are killing people as wantonly as though they were field mice, not in battle, but in cold blood; cutting them down in the open roads, at the wells where they have gone for water, on their farms where they have stolen away to dig up a few potatoes, having first run the gauntlet of forts and risked their lives to obtain them. This is not an imaginary state of affairs, nor are these suppositious cases. I am writing only of things I have heard from eye-witnesses and of some things I have seen.

He continued by quoting from Cleveland's message to Congress and challenging the president to act accordingly. Despite having failed to reach rebel-controlled territory, Davis had presented Hearst with most of what he had gone for. The front page of the February 13 *Examiner* proclaimed, "Ships of War Ought to be Sent to Havana."

But Cleveland stood firm against intervention, and after his March 4 inauguration, so did McKinley. Another year passed before Hearst got his war. Authorizing Creelman three years later to publish the story of his telegram to Remington was Hearst's way of gaining lasting recognition for his part in having fomented it.

Preparing *On the Great Highway* for publication

At the beginning of 1901 Creelman had been reporting from Washington for the *Journal* and *Examiner* on the McKinley administration's policies concerning the overseas possessions acquired from Spain and the Congressional debate over the war in the Philippines. He championed the plan to build an American canal across Nicaragua in opposition to the "discredited Panama scheme with its background of bribery and disaster." After publication of his May 12 *Examiner* column, "The Fallacies of Socialism," he took leave to complete his book.

Creelman's publisher was Lothrop Publishing Company of Boston. In the summer of 1901, while completing the final edit of his manuscript, Creelman rented a luxurious Crowninshield cottage at nearby Clifton, Massachusetts. He and his wife hosted Mary Baird Bryan, the wife of William Jennings Bryan, and three Bryan children, while the former presidential candidate was on a lecture tour in the South.

Creelman was a celebrity in his own right, followed in the newspapers even as his own byline was absent. The headline over a lengthy unsigned special report in the July 14 *Atlanta Constitution*, maybe tipped by Bryan, proclaimed "Creelman's New Book Will Create Sensation":

It isn't every writer for a newspaper who receives the compliment of having his absence missed when his name ceases to appear in its accustomed haunts, for the newspaper is a thing of the day, and as a rule there is but little general interest in the personality of the men who make it. A half dozen or more letters of inquiry which have come to me within the past two weeks show, however, that there is at least one exception to the general rule laid down above—one man who is missed. He is James Creelman.

"What has become of Creelman?" is the general tenor of those inquiries, for it is some time since Mr. Creelman's signature has been seen in the columns of the New York Journal, with which newspaper he has for some time been prominently identified. As Mr. Creelman is well known in the south, where he is popular with public men and the reading masses as well, I have thought it would be of interest to write an answer to these queries.

Creelman is writing a book. After twenty-five years of steady and strenuous service in active journalism, the famous war correspondent is now taking a little rest and is whiling away his time in writing what I believe will be the most interesting book of the year. . . .

Forty thousand words of the 70,000 are ready for the publishers, the date of publication has been set for the 1st of January. . . . There has been no announcement of it yet, but I succeeded in persuading him that these southern people who are so anxious to know his whereabouts have a right to be considered; hence this story. . . .

He does not attempt to defend all of the acts done in the name of yellow journalism, but he shows that the spirit of this journalism of action is in accord with the theories which Henry Grady put into effect in *The Constitution*—the theory that it is the part of journalism to act and do things and not merely to record the doings of others. In this chapter Mr. Creelman gives some very interesting inside facts showing the part which the newspapers played in developing that sentiment which brought on the war with Spain, and showing, moreover, that there were other things which the men in control of these newspapers stood ready to do in order to promote the interests of their country.

Perhaps I should be more explicit and say that he refers particularly to The New York Journal and Mr. Hearst in this connection. I wish I had permission to tell of one of these episodes, for I am sure it is going to create a sensation when it is told and I would naturally like to tell it first. But I cannot.

The July 16 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* spelled out one of Creelman's stories, in a column signed A.B.A. titled "Washington Correspondents as Authors":

James Creelman will narrate his experiences as an interviewer of great men. . . . He will devote one chapter to the inside workings of yellow journalism, a subject that he is thoroughly competent to discourse upon. As showing the power of the sensational press of this country, he will tell the following incident: Shortly before the declaration of war between the United States and Spain the proprietor of the paper with which he was then connected sent Remington, the well known artist, to Cuba with instructions to work up a number of war pictures. After reaching Cuba and investigating the situation there, Remington cabled back that everything in the island was apparently peaceful; that there was no war sentiment, so far as he could see, or any immediate likelihood of a contest between the United States and Spain. Upon receipt of this message, the newspaper proprietor referred to sent Remington the following laconic telegram: "You furnish the pictures and I will furnish the war." And, says Creelman, he did.

As events transpired, Creelman's "little rest" from the pages of Hearst's newspapers was abruptly cut short when Leon Czolgosz shot McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo on September 6, 1901. The September 9 *Buffalo Commercial* reported: "He was in Clifton, Mass., working on a book last Friday evening, when he received a telegram from the managing editor of the New York Journal, telling him to hurry at once to Buffalo."

McKinley assassination: competitors blame Hearst

The shooting came as a shock to the nation, but as a personal calamity for Hearst, whose adversaries were quick to lay responsibility on him and his publications for having incited the attack. Ever since McKinley's first inauguration in March 1896, incendiary editorials in the *Journal* and the *Examiner* had disparaged the president.

On February 4, 1900, the day after Kentucky Governor William Goebel died from an assassin's bullet, the *Examiner's* editorial page had included this doggerel verse by Ambrose Bierce:

The bullet that pierced Goebel's chest
Cannot be found in all the West;
Good reason: it is speeding here
To stretch McKinley on the Bier.

As if that had not been bad enough, an unsigned editorial in the April 10, 1901, *Journal*, usually attributed to the New York editor, Arthur Brisbane, included this passage: "Institutions, like men, will last until they die; and if bad men and bad institutions can be got rid of only by killing, then the killing must be done."

To rescue Hearst from the echoes of his own papers was a tall order, but Creelman did his best. His September 12 dispatch told of McKinley calmly reciting the Lord's Prayer before undergoing surgery, closing with these lines: "The eyelids fluttered faintly, beads of cold sweat on the bloodless brow. There was silence. Then science succeeded prayer. If there is a nobler scene in the history of Christian statesmen and rulers than this, I have not heard of it."

McKinley died two days later. Creelman's September 14 dispatch on the inauguration of Theodore Roosevelt began:

The magnificent moral and mental balance of the nation found utterance this afternoon, when President Roosevelt, after taking the oath of office in the little drawing room of Ansley Wilcox's house, declared that he would continue all the policies inaugurated in the McKinley administration for the good of the country.

It was the apotheosis of common sense. In that one simple sentence the president found a supreme tribute to the memory of his martyred predecessor and instantly solved the political and commercial crisis. He demonstrated the fact that the policies of a great nation cannot be influenced by assassination.

But J.M. Beck, special correspondent for Iowa's *Muscatine Journal*, filed a report from behind the scenes about how big-city correspondents were covering the event:

When I first saw him and heard him talk I did not know him. I said to myself: "There is a man who is lacking in finer sensibilities but I will wager he sends them some red hot stuff." Then I learned he was Creelman. Later in conversation he spoke of Roosevelt. It was evident he did not intend to throw bouquets at Teddy. Mark Hanna was mentioned and Creelman ventured the opinion that Mark was sorry he ever allowed Roosevelt to be nominated.

Returning to Massachusetts, instead of adhering to the announced January 1 publication date, Creelman hastily added a final chapter on the assassination, titled "McKinley, the Forgiving," and his publisher expedited production of the book. But the public did not forgive Hearst.

Nasaw wrote, "For perhaps the first time in his life, Hearst was forced onto the defensive. As a rather blatant attempt to establish his patriotic bona fides, he changed the name of his New York morning paper to the *American and Journal*, and later on dropped the *Journal* entirely from the title."

What Hearst had anticipated as an occasion to bask in the glow of Creelman's praise for his bold intervention in world affairs instead found him hiding out in fear of his life, keeping a pistol in his desk and ordering his staff to burn parcels that arrived by mail, worried that they might contain bombs. It was not a propitious moment for him to celebrate his papers' effectiveness at fomenting war. *Journal* and *Examiner* reviews highlighted less truculent chapters of Creelman's book.

Critical reviews of *On the Great Highway*

Previews of *On the Great Highway* appeared in newspapers exactly two weeks after the former president's death, teasing readers with this: "The inner methods used by the American press to bring on the war with Spain are told in the book, and a letter to Mr. Creelman is given which instructs him to sink a steamship in the Suez Canal in order to delay the Spanish fleet against Admiral Dewey."

Some critics regarded Creelman's reports of Hearst's telegram to Remington and letter to himself as evidence of improper, possibly illegal, acts. An unsigned item in the staid *New York Times* of October 12, 1901, on the News and Notes page, scoffed:

Mr. Creelman's . . . book, delayed in publication in order that a new chapter on the late President might be added, went to press this week. Its disclosures might open inquiries as to events immediately preceding the war. Men who would not wait for letters of marque before proceeding against a declared enemy might take strong measures to bring on a conflict too tardy for their desires.

A harsher critique came in “Sensational Journalism and the Law” by George W. Alger in the February 1903 *Atlantic Monthly*, which syndicated this excerpt to newspapers:

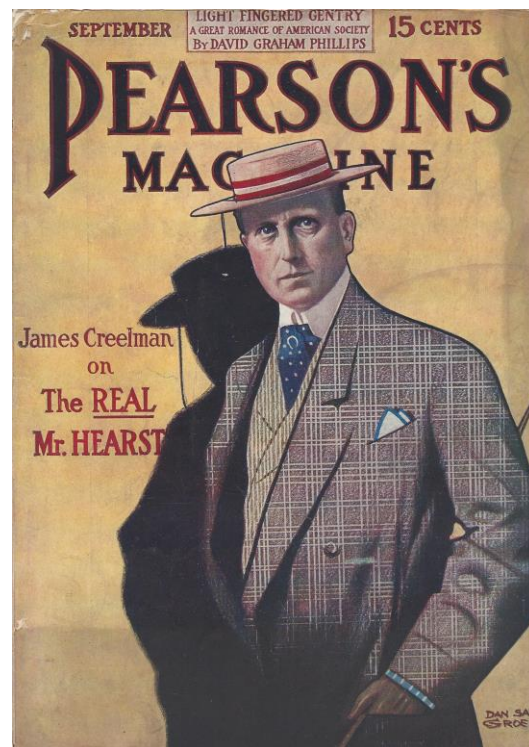
It is, of course, impossible to determine accurately the extent of newspaper influence upon legislation and the conduct of public affairs by these systematic attempts at bullying. Making all due allowance, however, there have been within recent years many significant illustrations of the influence of yellow journalism upon the shaping of public events. Mr. Creelman is quite right in saying, as he does in his interesting book *On the Great Highway*, that the story of the Spanish war is incomplete which overlooks the part that yellow journalism had in bringing it on. He tells us that some time prior to the commencement of hostilities a well-known artist, who had been sent to Cuba as a representative of one of these papers, and had there grown tired of inaction, telegraphed his chief that there was no prospect of war, and that he wished to come home. The reply he received was characteristic of the journalism he represented: “You furnish the pictures, we will furnish the war.” It is characteristic because the new journalism aims to direct rather than to influence, and seeks, to an extent never attempted or conceived by the journalism it endeavors so strenuously to supplant, to create public sentiment rather than to mould it, to make measures and find men.

Neither positive reviewers nor critics of *On the Great Highway* doubted the accuracy of Creelman’s report. To all of them it was plainly true.

“The Real Mr. Hearst” by Creelman, published in 1906 and again in 1912

In a September 1906 *Pearson’s* magazine article titled “The Real Mr. Hearst,” Creelman repeated verbatim the anecdote about Hearst’s telegram to Remington, and once again graphically reproduced Hearst’s letter that had urged him to obtain and sink a ship in the Suez Canal.

The *Pearson’s* article amounted to a biography assisted and authorized by its subject, replete with photographs from Hearst’s family album, including baby pictures, formal portraits, and a snapshot of him personally taking Spanish sailors prisoner at Santiago de Cuba in 1898, timed to promote his campaign for governor of New York. “As Mr. Hearst sat in his New York house a few weeks ago, he talked freely of his cause.”



Here it was obvious, if it had not been obvious five years earlier, that Creelman’s source for the Remington telegram story was William Randolph Hearst himself, and that Hearst intended that he publish it.

A shorter version of “The Real Mr. Hearst” without the pictures appeared simultaneously in *Maclean’s* magazine. Once again the story of Hearst’s telegram was widely quoted in newspapers from coast to coast. Again, no contemporaneous reports challenged its validity.

Pearson’s republished the article in 1912, omitting only Hearst’s statements about issues from his 1906 campaign that were no longer pertinent, along with an editorial titled “Who’s for Hearst and Why” that attempted to drum up support for Hearst as a candidate for president of the United States.

There is no mystery about why the telegram to Remington became a fixture of American journalism. With the assistance of Creelman, his most loyal and trusted reporter, Hearst cast it as a key ingredient of the legend he crafted for himself as a candidate for public office. Despite the difficulty he had faced over the McKinley assassination, the occasion of its first widespread publication proved to be an asset for his successful 1902 campaign for a seat in Congress; the second, for his unsuccessful 1906 campaign for governor of New York; the third, for a 1912 attempt to stir support for Hearst as a presidential prospect.

Hearst’s “we’ll furnish the war” story to Hedda Hopper

Implicit substantiation of Creelman’s story came half a century after its initial publication from an unlikely witness. Hollywood gossip columnist Hedda Hopper had been a frequent overnight guest at Hearst’s San Simeon estate since the 1920s. In 1952 (the exact date depends on the paper cited; I’m quoting from the October 3 *San Francisco Chronicle*) she recalled:

When W.R. was in a happy mood he would dissect history for you, then put it together again. Reminiscing about the Spanish-American War, he and Arthur Brisbane did just that one night. W.R. had Richard Harding Davis, a brilliant writer of the swashbuckling school, under contract. Davis loved a good scrap above everything else, and Hearst and Brisbane plotted to hand him one.

“You go after the story and pictures,” they told him; “we’ll furnish the war.” If they didn’t absolutely bring on the Spanish-American War, they sure furnished it at that dinner. Somehow I’ve always believed that was the way it happened.

Hopper repeated the story in fewer words five years later, in her August 26, 1957, *Chicago Tribune* syndicated column:

Things always picked up when the late Arthur Brisbane came to visit. One night at dinner with only a few guests present he and W.R. went into hilarious reminiscences of Spanish-American War days when they sent Richard Harding Davis to cover the war with instructions to send back plenty of stories and pictures. He should take care of the reporting; they’d take care of the war.

In both instances Hopper named Davis as Hearst’s correspondent in Cuba, probably having recognized his name as a Hollywood celebrity, but she included Hearst’s instruction to send pictures as well as stories. Creelman had named only Remington in his two chronicles that included that request, possibly leaving Davis out because Davis had broken faith with Hearst. Hearst had sent both men—Davis to write stories and Remington to furnish pictures. (Davis did bring back photographs.)

Maybe both Hopper and Creelman had heard or had remembered only those parts of the larger story; maybe one or both blended the stories Hearst told them about the 1897 mission with the later story of the 1898 war. But despite the discrepancy they are guileless and complementary memories.

The details in Hopper’s recollections also coincided with Davis and Remington’s assignment. It’s likely that “I’ll furnish the war” had become Hearst’s watchword for the entire

project, repeated to each participant, probably more than once. That deduction explains why neither Remington nor Davis took exception to Creelman's report.

Implausible denial: "clotted nonsense"

The September 30, 1907, edition of *The Times* of London carried a dispatch datelined September 29 from its New York correspondent, headed "The American Press." The concluding paragraph probably referred to Creelman's 1906 article in *Pearson's* or *Maclean's*:

Is the Press of the United States going insane? It is no use trying to minimize the gravity of its attitude or its ability to stir up trouble. We know pretty well by now what was the real cause of the Spanish-American war and the man who among all Americans was chiefly responsible for it. A letter from Mr. William Randolph Hearst is in existence, and was printed in a magazine not long ago. It was to an artist whom he had sent to Cuba, and who reported no likelihood of war. Mr. Hearst instructed him to stay. "You provide the pictures," he wrote. "I'll provide the war."

A shorter version of that paragraph only, not the full dispatch from New York, appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*.

The November 2 *Times* published a cable from Hearst dated November 1 that began with this diatribe, and was followed by a reprint of the original dispatch from *The Times's* New York correspondent:

Gentlemen:—Since some lineal descendant of Ananias became the correspondent of the London *Times* in New York that newspaper has printed many articles from America as absurd and outrageous as the famous Pigott forgeries which appeared in its columns and the ridiculous tale of the boiling in oil of the German Ambassador at Peking. No efforts of this offspring of Ananias, however, have been more frankly false and more ingeniously idiotic than the assertion in *The Times* of September 30 that there was a letter in existence from Mr. W. R. Hearst in which Mr. Hearst said to a Correspondent in Cuba:—"You provide the pictures and I will provide the war," and, the intimation that Mr. Hearst was chiefly responsible for the Spanish war.

This kind of clotted nonsense could only be generally circulated and generally believed in England, where newspapers claiming to be conservative and reliable are the most utterly untrustworthy of any on earth. In apology for these newspapers it may be said that their untrustworthiness is not always due to intention, but more frequently to ignorance and prejudice. Any informed and unprejudiced person knows that the one cause of the Spanish war was Spain, and that from the time of the blowing up of the Maine in Havana Harbour war was inevitable.

The rest of Hearst's letter dealt with reports of Roosevelt's transfer of the U.S. fleet to the Pacific as an implicit threat to Japan. The editorial page in the same issue included one titled "Mr. Hearst and 'The Times'," written with relish:

It is with real satisfaction that we publish this morning, a *titre de document*, a remarkable letter from MR. WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST. In a despatch from our Correspondent at New York we published on September 30 a statement by which MR. HEARST, after thinking the matter over for three weeks after it reached New York, finds himself grievously offended. He replies to-day by cable, in terms of which the ferocity will strike the reflecting reader as just a little too carefully calculated and just a little too exactly timed. By sending his letter so that it should appear on November 2, MR. HEARST has secured that his views about England, and *The Times*, and a possible war with Japan, should be cabled back to America just in time to influence next Tuesday's elections. . . .

It would have been simpler, of course, and more useful as history, if he had sent his repudiation of the offending story to the magazine which printed it, and not to us, who merely quoted a phrase from it; or if, instead of lecturing us for our comments on the cruise of the American fleet to the Pacific, he had rebuked the *New York Sun*, whose scathing criticism our correspondent reproduced in the same despatch. But it would not have been so effective. It would have had less journalistic value. It would have been less worthy of MR. HEARST.

On the same date as his cable to London, Hearst addressed a meeting of the Irish-American Political Union at Cooper Union, revealing the intent behind his ruse. The November 2 *New York Times* reported:

“Before I retired permanently from politics, as I have done,” he said, “I thought that if ever I were elected President of the United States I would send to the Court of St. James an Irish-American. Now that I am out of politics I offer the suggestion to somebody else, with the ardent hope that it will be acted upon.”

He said a few cutting things about American Ambassadors to England, who within a few weeks after their arrival over there grow more English and snobbish than their new English butlers.

“I have thought that the alleged friendship of England for this country,” went on Mr. Hearst, “was of the banqueting order. It begins with sherry and ends with champagne. I don’t think much of this hands-across-the-sea business. I have never seen the hand of England outstretched to this country unless there was some sort of brick in its clasp. We have been favored with two distinct types of these bricks—the ordinary barnyard type of brick and the gold-brick.”

Hearst’s *New York American* had featured his cable to *The Times* under the headline, “Hearst Letter to the London Times called a Bombshell.” In “Twisting the Lion’s Tail,” the *New York Herald* attributed actual authorship of the cable to Brisbane, not Hearst, and ridiculed it.

Alerted to the original text in Creelman’s book by a reader’s letter signed “X,” *The Times* of November 7 opined:

Nothing could be more emphatic than [Hearst’s] denial of his own correspondence with MR. REMINGTON from which a passage was quoted by our New York Correspondent in his despatch which appeared on September 30; nothing could be more conclusive than the evidence of that correspondence which was furnished by “X” on Monday, from a book published seven years ago in America by one of his own staff. We apprehend that even MR. HEARST would hardly shelter himself behind the quibble that what he denied was the “existence” of a “letter”—instead of a telegram—which he might reasonably think had been destroyed, or the accidental substitution of the word “provide” for the word “furnish.” Apart from quibbles, he stands convicted of deliberate falsehood, until he can produce some more convincing proof to the contrary than his mere blustering assertions about “clotted nonsense.”

The *Herald*’s barbed commentary on the squabble between *The Times* and the *American* hatched a canard that further obscured the original story. The *Herald* had ascribed authorship of Hearst’s November 1907 cable to *The Times* to Brisbane, but as word spread among journalists, Brisbane transmuted into the rumored author of Hearst’s January 1897 telegram to Remington.

A 1909 announcement for Brisbane’s lecture, “The Newspaper Today—The Fourth Estate of America,” recited the story of Remington’s telegram from Havana. “To this he promptly received the following answer characteristic of Hearst, although alleged to have been written by Brisbane: Remington, Havana, ‘You furnish the pictures; I’ll furnish the war’.”

Brisbane could not have been responsible for Hearst’s January 1897 telegram; he was the editor of Pulitzer’s *World* until Hearst lured him away in December of 1897. But after switching to the *Journal*, he did contribute his own eager effort to furnish Hearst’s war.

Hearst's "privately denied" claim retracted and corrected

The full-length biography *W. R. Hearst: An American Phenomenon* by John K. Winkler, published in 1928, picked up the story in December 1896 after the *Journal* and *Herald* had published the pro-intervention results of the governors' poll:

The Spanish commander in Cuba, General Valeriano Weyler ("Butcher" Weyler, the *Journal* christened him), expelled some of the Hearst representatives, Hearst sent others and the *Journal* managed to get the news—and to make the news. One of the special correspondents was Frederic Remington, the eminent artist, who drew notable sketches of Spanish cruelty. After a short time Remington sent this telegram from Havana:

W.R. Hearst, *New York Journal*, N.Y.:

Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return.

REMINGTON

This is the answer Hearst is said to have written:

Remington, Havana:

Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.

W. R. HEARST

Hearst has since privately denied that this telegram was actually sent. It is doubtful whether such an inflammatory message would have been permitted to go through by the Marquis de Palmerola, secretary to Weyler and chief censor at Havana. But there is no question the words quoted represented the attitude, the desire and the hope of the owner of the *New York Journal*.

Whether or not he made the boast in a wire to Remington, the new genius of sensationalism tried to "furnish the war."

. . . The Spanish-American War came as close to being a "one man war" as any conflict in our history.

Winkler had written while Hearst was alive and at the peak of success, making do with second-hand sources outside his subject's inner circle. His sequel, *William Randolph Hearst: A New Appraisal*, appeared in 1955, after Hearst had died, and was published by the Avon Book Division of the Hearst Corporation.

In his acknowledgments for the second book Winkler wrote, "Thanks are also due to W.R. Hearst, Jr., and the Hearst Trustees and officers of the Hearst Corporation for their co-operation in making personal and confidential files available without restriction." This time he made a significant change in the anecdote.

Winkler repeated the passage quoted above almost verbatim from his first book, but he replaced the sentence that said Hearst had privately denied sending the telegram with this one:

Hearst later privately denied that his telegram was couched in the epigrammatic form quoted.

After Hopper published her first-hand account of Hearst's reminiscence at San Simeon, no savvy reader could have doubted that the Remington telegram anecdote was substantially true, even though she had referred by name only to Davis. Whether or not she knew it, her 1952 column presupposed the artist's part in that story. Winkler's revised report confirmed that Hearst had sent the cable, but not "in the epigrammatic form" that Hearst had led Creelman to believe.

A chain of denials and rejoinders 1980-1991, link by link

After Winkler corrected his original report and acknowledged that Hearst really had sent a telegram to Remington, there appear to have been no further challenges to the story for the next 25 years. But in a 1979 dissertation and his 1980 book *William Randolph Hearst: His Role in American Progressivism*, Roy Everett Littlefield III wrote:

The famous telegram from Hearst, 'you furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the war,' supposedly sent in response to the artist's insistence that all was quiet in Cuba and that war was unlikely, was probably never written. The telegram is sufficiently disturbing that only the most confidential denial—in circumstances in which the denial would never become public or otherwise be to Hearst's advantage—would be usable as strong evidence of its not having existed; but Hearst questioned years later by his son was to make just such a denial. . . .

Yet the tone of the telegram, real or fictional, does represent how Hearst felt.

He wrote:

Whatever is right can be achieved through the irresistible power of awakened and informed public opinion. Our object, therefore, is not to inquire whether a thing can be done, but whether it ought to be done, and if it ought to be done, to so exert the forces of publicity that public opinion will compel it to be done.

That last quotation is from an unpublished memorandum that Hearst's son had provided to Littlefield when Littlefield interviewed him November 25, 1978. Without an explanation of the context, I cannot understand why Hearst Senior's confession to his son was deemed sensitive and "most confidential"—after all, Hearst had not been shy about seeking advantage by publicly cabling his pseudo-denial to *The Times* in 1907—or whether it differed from the information Hearst Junior and his staff had provided to Winkler.

Littlefield did not respond to my request for clarification, but after 40 years he might not have much to add. The son's 1978 recollection of his father's denial attracted wider scholarly attention after John D. Stevens cited it in his 1991 book *Sensationalism and the New York Press*. Stevens wrote:

Creelman's memoir is the only evidence for the infamous anecdote about Hearst's cabling Remington that he would provide the war. Although Creelman was in Florida at that time and gave no indication of where or how he learned the story, historians still repeat it. Neither Remington nor Davis mentioned it, either in frequent letters home nor in later memoirs, and Hearst flatly denied the story.

Stevens's footnote read, "William Jr. told a researcher that his father always denounced the story as pure fabrication," citing Littlefield. His paraphrase gratuitously exaggerated what Littlefield actually wrote, and he omitted Littlefield's "probably never written," "real or fictional," and "does represent how Hearst felt" ambivalence.

Stevens also was careless with details. Creelman was in Europe, not in Florida, when Remington and Davis were in Cuba. But despite his exaggerations, omissions, and carelessness, Stevens's twice-removed narrative spread the denial story among historians of journalism.

Dom Bonafede, associate professor of communications at American University in Washington, D.C., wrote, in a letter to the *New York Times* titled "Hearst Didn't Send Cable to Remington," published August 1, 1991:

American journalism is so steeped in folklore and mythology that it is often nearly impossible to separate fact from fiction. Sylvia Orans (letter, July 9) repeats the persistent fable about William Randolph Hearst's purported cable to the artist Frederic Remington, whom he had sent to Cuba to provide illustrations of the United States war with Spain—"You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

It makes a good story and catches the flavor of "yellow journalism" practiced by Hearst. But there is no evidence, nor has there ever been any, that Hearst sent such a cable.

In "Sensationalism and the New York Press" (New York, 1991), John D. Stevens, professor of communications at the University of Michigan, noted that the apocryphal tale originated with James

Creelman, a “bellicose” reporter for Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World who was kicked out of Cuba in 1896 by the Spaniards because of wildly irresponsible dispatches. Hearst apparently perceived this as a recommendation and lured him away from Pulitzer to write for Hearst’s New York Journal.

Bonafede’s final paragraph quoted Stevens’s passage about Creelman’s book and Hearst’s denial.

University of Rhode Island journalism lecturer Frederic A. Moritz, a former *Christian Science Monitor* foreign correspondent and later the founder of the American Human Rights Reporting as a Global Watchdog website, sent this rejoinder, published August 10 under the title “Source for Hearst Cable is Credible”:

The time should be past when a newspaper correspondent is discredited simply because he or she has been expelled by a government for reporting on military atrocities or human rights abuses.

Unfortunately, Prof. Dom Bonafede of American University arbitrarily endorses Spain’s version of events in Cuba during the 1890’s by declaring (letter, Aug. 1) that James Creelman of Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World “was kicked out of Cuba in 1896 because of his wildly irresponsible dispatches.”

Joseph Pulitzer had sent Creelman to Cuba precisely because of his established track record in breaking the story of the massacre of some 2,000 Chinese civilians by Japanese troops who captured the Manchurian city of Port Arthur during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894.

The Japanese apologized for these excesses in a letter to Pulitzer’s New York World. Tokyo ordered an official investigation. Reporters and other witnesses from Britain and elsewhere substantially confirmed Creelman’s account.

We should not simply dismiss as “no evidence” Creelman’s contention in his memoirs that William Randolph Hearst cabled the artist Frederic Remington on the eve of the Spanish-American War: “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.” Whether or not Hearst actually sent that cable, the fact that Creelman (who had been hired away from Pulitzer to Hearst’s New York Journal) attests he did is evidence that must be considered.

That the Spanish Government of the day disliked Creelman’s reporting on its repression of Cuban insurgents by executions and forcible movement of rural populations should not be a deciding consideration. In debating the motives and credibility of journalists who report such abuses, we must remember that the stories of cruelty they sometimes tell so dramatically all too often do have much basis in fact.

Hearst’s biographer William A. Swanberg, author of the 1961 biography *Citizen Hearst*, added his opinion, “Hearst Intended to Furnish Spanish War,” published September 14:

Letters Aug. 1 and 20 have argued the authenticity of an 1897 William Randolph Hearst wire from New York to his artist in Cuba, Frederic Remington. Hearst, outraged over Spanish troops sent to quell Cuban rebels, published Spanish “atrocities” and urged our entry into the war against Spain. Remington, finding no atrocities, wired: “There will be no war. I wish to return.” Hearst wired back: “Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.”

So wrote James Creelman, long a valued Hearst reporter who had served in Cuba. Some have doubted him because Hearst later denied sending the wire—inconsequential in view of Hearst’s unreliable veracity.

Consider only one of the intrigues he used to bring on war with Spain. Pretty Evangelina Cisneros had been jailed in Cuba for trying to free her father, imprisoned for aiding the rebels. For weeks the Hearst press headlined this “brutality,” now saying she had been locked up for defending her person against a lustful Spanish colonel. Since our country would not save “The Flower of Cuba,” as she was termed, all Hearst stringers were ordered to get backing from influential women. Julia Ward Howe, Clara Barton, President McKinley’s mother and hundreds of others filled 12 Hearst newspaper columns of women demanding release for the Flower who defended her chastity.

Scores of prominent British women were also enlisted, and a Hearst cable asked Pope Leo XIII to intercede.

Then two well-paid Hearstmen easily freed Evangelina by bribery, and she sailed to New York. Hearst put her up at the Waldorf and arranged a Madison Square extravaganza, where she appeared in filmy finery—accompanied by fireworks and two bands—to uproarious applause.

“Evangelina Cisneros Rescued by The Journal,” the paper reported. Later, when we entered the war against Spain, the headline was, “How Do You Like the Journal’s War?”

Who can disbelieve that Hearst wired Remington, “I’ll furnish the war”? I quoted it in my 1961 biography of Hearst. It was his purpose from the start.

William Randolph Hearst Jr.’s public denial

One more denial came from Hearst’s son and heir, written with professional assistance, in his 1994 memoir, *The Hearsts: Father and Son* by William Randolph Hearst, Jr., with Jack Casserly, about 15 years after Littlefield interviewed him.

Or so it seemed. According to his publisher’s dust-jacket summary, part of the book’s purpose was to respond to “images that were highly embellished in Orson Welles’ reproach of the Hearst persona, *Citizen Kane*.”

Here is how Hearst Junior responded to the motion picture’s embellishments: “I have never seen *Citizen Kane*, out of principle and deference to the old man. However, our lawyers and others who dissected it scene by scene filled me in on the details. I feel as if I’ve viewed every frame.” Not having viewed the film, he nevertheless condemned it as “morally reprehensible”; also as “untruthful and unfair.”

Paul Walker’s June 26, 1941, *Harrisburg Telegraph* review had described the motion picture as “the screen’s nearest approach to true art.”

Any high school boy can see the obvious source of the plot: the life of William Randolph Hearst, who had a great deal to do with writing and at times distorting current American history for the great god Circulation. Mr. Hearst’s public and private life is present—at least by inference. The correspondent in Cuba writes of some nice “prose poems about the country” but adds, “I see little chance of war.”

“You furnish the prose poems and we’ll furnish the war,” wires “Publisher Kane.”

Here is how Hearst Junior and his co-author addressed his father’s 1897-1898 adventure in Cuba:

Pop believed the war did produce a hero—one of his *Journal* reporters, James Creelman. Creelman begged army officers to allow him to join their charge on a fort. On launching the attack, they motioned the reporter to follow. In the fight Creelman captured the first Spanish flag of the war. He said that the *Journal* deserved it because the paper had played such an important role in the conflict. Creelman waved the flag at furious Spanish soldiers, who fired, wounding him in the left arm. The newsman was carried down the hill with other wounded, and someone draped the flag over his body. Creelman passed out and awoke to see my father kneeling over him. The reporter later recounted that my father wore a Panama hat with a bright ribbon around it, and his face was “radiant with enthusiasm.” Pop said, “I’m sorry you’re hurt, but wasn’t it a splendid fight? We beat every paper in the world.”

The war also produced one of the great footnotes in journalistic history. Before hostilities began, Pop had sent the famous artist Frederic Remington to Havana to portray the action. Remington got bored sitting around hotel beaches and cabled his message to my father: “Everything is quiet. There will be no war. I wish to return. Remington.”

Pop’s biographers, most of whom never consulted him, quoted him as saying: “Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war. W.R. Hearst.” It’s a wonderful story, of course, and has gotten many a wry chuckle. The only trouble is, it’s not true. Pop told me he never sent any such cable. And there has never been any proof that he did. But with headline salvos

against Spain, he did in fact help to furnish the war. In any case, Remington stayed, and his later sketches of the conflict filled full pages in the *Journal*.

Where to begin? Hearst Junior evidently did not know that Pop's hero Creelman—a biographer who had consulted Pop—was the first writer to publish the story; that Remington did not get bored sitting around hotel beaches in Havana; and that Remington did not stay in Cuba after writing that he wished to return home.

With that much wrong, how credible can the rest be? What did Pop really say about his telegram? When

did he say it? In what context? Might it have been when the lawyers' frame-by-frame report reached Charles Foster Kane's line about furnishing the war? Or did he merely deny that his telegram was couched in the epigrammatic form quoted?

Whatever he might have been told or meant to say, Hearst Junior's denial of Hearst Senior's telegram to Remington cannot overcome abundant evidence provided by credible witnesses Creelman and Hopper; the admission in Winkler's second book; and the absence of qualms or qualifications from Davis or Remington.

W. Joseph Campbell, the *enfant terrible* denier

W. Joseph Campbell, a tenured full professor in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C., is Bonafede's intellectual heir, but with digital reach and vigilante clout for his scolds that Bonafede never enjoyed.

Campbell has built a career out of denying that Hearst sent the telegram. His campaign began with the publication of an article titled "Not Likely Sent: The Remington-Hearst 'Telegrams,'" in the Summer 2000 issue of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. He continued the next year with a chapter of that title and additional mentions in his book *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies*.

Campbell's 2010 book *Getting it Wrong: Debunking the Greatest Myths in American Journalism* featured "'I'll Furnish the War': The Making of a Media Myth" as its first chapter, which, he wrote, "presents fresh evidence that the vow was never made." The Society of Professional Journalists honored that book with its Sigma Delta Chi Award in Research. He

THE BATTLE OF CANEY—By W. R. Hearst.

The Editor of the Journal Describes the Great Struggle as He Saw It on the Battlefield.

James Creelman, Journal Correspondent, in the Lead of the Awful Charge, Wounded, but Captures a Spanish Flag.

Copyright, 1898, by W. R. Hearst. Special Cable to the Evening Journal.

With the Army in front of Santiago, July 1, midnight, via Kingston, Jamaica, July 3—Tonight, as I write this, the ambulance trains are bringing in the wounded soldiers from the fierce battle around the little inland village of Caney.

Siboney, the base of the army, is a hospital and nothing more. There is no saying when the slaughter will cease. The tents are crowded with wounded, and the hard-worked surgeons are busy with their mechanical work. There is an odor of anesthetics and the clatter of ambulances in the one narrow street.

Under the fierce firing of far heavier artillery than it was supposed the Spanish had, the American infantry and dismounted cavalry have done their worst, and done it nobly.

I have been at the artillery positions all day to see what our guns could do or could not do. There is no question of the skill or courage of American gunners. Their work was as near perfect as gunnery gets to be, but there was no artillery to speak of.

The War Department has furnished the necessary heavy guns, but they remain in the rear, because of the difficulty of transportation from the coast.

I sat out before daybreak this morning on horseback with Honore Laine, who is a colonel in the Cuban Army, and his served for months as the Journal's correspondent in Cuba. We rode over eight miles of difficult country which intervenes between the army base on the coast and the fighting line which is being driven forward toward Santiago.

We arrived at the front on the ridge of Poso, where our batteries



Correspondent Creelman Dictating His Story to W. R. Hearst.

Magnificent Fighting by C Troops as They Rushed Up the Fortified Hill and Drove the Spaniards to Flight.

In the other attack around the Spanish base, I displayed it to our men, they cheered lustily.

"Hill as I rushed to reach to Captain Blisset I was struck by a bullet from the trenches on the Spanish side."

Such was the graphic story Creelman told me he lay wounded and in the trenches.

THEN CANEY WAS CAPTURED.

General Chacón moved on and took the breastworks and Caney over the town.

General Chacón says he is much astonished at the number of men in the hospital tents, as it did not contain over a thousand Spanish. Twenty-five of these were killed and fifty were taken prisoner. The killed wounded on our side exceeded these figures.

The Twelfth had heavily. Lieutenant Churchman was shot through the head, and Sergeant Miller, of the first company, was killed.

The Spanish flag captured from the Spanish ranks but I will forward the Journal by mail.

W. R. HEARST.

SHAFTER SENDS LIST OF WOUNDED OFFICERS

Washington, July 4.—The Secretary of War this afternoon has received a list of the names of the wounded officers. All of the official reports of injuries had not yet in. Will forward as they receive.

JAMES P. HARRIS, Lieutenant Colonel, Cavalry, killed.

THEODORE HOPPER, Captain, Twentieth Infantry.

Dr. H. WELLS, Second Lieutenant, Eleventh Infantry.

By J. HANWICK, Compiler General, U. S. A.

produced a second revised edition in 2017. His publisher, University of California Press, hosts his blog, which promotes him as a heroic myth-buster.

Campbell also maintains his own Media Myth Alert website, which has repeated his denial ritual each time a writer dares to suggest that Remington and Hearst exchanged telegrams in 1897. As I write, his most recent post on the subject, dated June 17, 2019, concludes with this: “In any event, the evidence is overwhelming that the Remington-Hearst anecdote is false. And it is not divisible; if one half is apocryphal, the other must be too.”

Except for that last logic-defying point, which not even Hearst Junior would have asserted, Campbell has been repeating the same arguments for 20 years, which are as lame and unpersuasive as that one: If Hearst did not telegraph his intention to “furnish the war,” why must one therefore draw the conclusion that Remington had been so rude as to leave Havana earlier than expected without first cabling notice to Hearst?

Kenneth Whyte wrote almost the opposite in his 2009 book *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst*:

It is probable that something like the exchange reported by Creelman occurred; he was a generally reliable reporter and unlikely to fabricate from whole cloth an anecdote about two men still active in journalism. Remington’s half of the conversation is believable. An alarmist about Cuba, he was disappointed that the U.S. didn’t invade while he was there—“I think there will be a war with Spain,” he had written his wife from Key West. The words attributed to Hearst cannot be dismissed out of hand given that he is on record as savoring an opportunity to push Spain out of the Caribbean, and only a year away from taking partial credit for furnishing a war (not withstanding his letter to the *Times*). But, that said, there are serious problems with Creelman’s story.

The supposedly “serious problems” Whyte noted were ones Campbell had raised in 2000 and 2001, so let us next proceed to those.

Refuting Campbell point by point

Campbell presented seven discrete reasons for disbelieving Creelman’s report:

Bullet point one: “Creelman at the time of the exchange was in Europe, as the *Journal*’s ‘special commissioner,’ or correspondent on the Continent. As such, Creelman could only have learned about the supposed exchange secondhand.” True, but how is that different from most journalism that isn’t based on eyewitness observations? Creelman was Hearst’s most trusted and loyal reporter, and his biographer. How much better a source could Creelman have had? Why might he have published such a story if Hearst had not verified it?

Bullet point two: “The contents of the purported telegrams bear little relation to events in Cuba in early 1897. Specifically, the passages ‘there will be no war’ and ‘I’ll furnish the war’ are at odds with the fierce and devastating conflict in Cuba that had begun in February 1895 and had forced Spain to send 200,000 soldiers to the island.” These are separate arguments, both wrong. Remington’s line was simply a way to evade delay by Spanish censorship. Hearst’s reflected his consistent policy of promoting U.S. military intervention that had begun with his telegram to every state governor in mid-December 1896.

Bullet point three: “Hearst’s supposed reply to Remington runs counter to the *Journal*’s editorial positions in January 1897. The newspaper in editorials at that time expected the collapse of the Spanish war effort and resulting independence for Cuban insurgents. The *Journal* was neither anticipating nor campaigning for U.S. military intervention to end the conflict.” False. Hearst’s editorials condemned the administration for failing to intervene, and reminded Congress

of its power to declare war. Both Creelman's and Davis's dispatches advocated intervention. Remington's private correspondence enthusiastically anticipated U.S. intervention.

Bullet point four: "It is improbable that such an exchange of telegrams would have been cleared by Spanish censors in Havana. So strict were the censors that dispatches from American correspondents reporting the war in Cuba often were taken by ship to Florida and transmitted from there." Campbell appears to have little understanding of how cable, postal, and press censorship was conducted. All military and civil censorship offices must rank subjects worthy of attention, because not every cable, letter, and publication can be translated, examined, and controlled. (I write as one who has studied, collected, and written about 20th century postal censorship for almost 50 years.) In 1897, anglophone Spanish censors would have examined all outgoing cables and dispatches by American correspondents, hence Remington's ruse to allay their concerns. They probably lacked sufficient resources or incentives to monitor much incoming traffic, but Hearst might nevertheless have resorted to circumspection in an abundance of caution.

Bullet point five: "The pithy epigram of the purported reply to Remington seems uncharacteristic of Hearst's telegrams. While not voluble or rambling in such messages, Hearst often offered specific suggestions and instructions to his representatives assigned to important tasks and missions. It is thus likely that if Hearst had exchanged telegrams with Remington in January 1897, his messages would have contained explicit instructions and suggestions." Not necessarily, if Hearst had been in a rush to reach Remington before the artist had time to board a steamer for Florida or New York.

Bullet point six: "The contemporaneous correspondence of Richard Harding Davis—the war correspondent with whom Remington traveled on the assignment to Cuba—contains no reference to Remington's wanting to leave because 'there will be no war.' Rather, Davis in his letter gave several other reasons for Remington's departure, including the artist's reluctance to travel through Spanish lines to reach the Cuban insurgents. Davis also said in his correspondence that *he* asked Remington to leave because the presence of the artist impeded his reporting." We know from Remington's own correspondence that he eagerly anticipated a war, but that spending more time with Davis would not have served a useful purpose.

Bullet point seven: "Had there been such an exchange, Remington was clearly insubordinate and, as such, risked Hearst's displeasure. Despite Hearst's supposed instruction to stay, Remington left Cuba for New York in mid-January 1897. The *Journal* subsequently gave considerable prominence to Remington's sketches—arguably not the kind of response Hearst would have made or permitted in the face of outright insubordination." Arguably? No. Only Campbell could read the sentence "Please remain" as an imperious imperative.

Those are his arguments. None are persuasive in light of the evidence I have adduced above. "The supposed exchange suggests not only reckless arrogance by Hearst but also speaks to the potential effects of the news media," he wrote in his first article. I agree, but Hearst was less reckless, less arrogant, and less potentially effective in his telegram to Remington than he was when he instructed Creelman to buy a large steamship and sink it to block the Suez Canal.

Campbell has festooned his article and books with footnotes, sometimes carelessly. For example, a footnote in his ironically titled book *Getting it Wrong* says, "See Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Frederic Remington: A Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 249. The Samuels biography uncritically reiterates Creelman's account of the purported Remington-Hearst exchange." The Samuelses actually wrote, "A decade later, Hearst denied having sent the cable. He called the whole tale 'clotted nonsense'."

Here is another example of questionable scholarship in *Getting it Wrong*: Campbell wrote, “After just six days in Cuba, on January 16, 1897, the artist left Havana aboard the *Seneca*, a New York-bound steamer that carried six other passengers.” His reference note cites two newspapers: the January 21 *New York Tribune* “Shipping News” report, which confirms that the *Seneca* debarked seven passengers at New York the previous day, but does not name them, and the January 19 *Diario de la Marina* of Havana, which I have been unable to locate.

But as I noted above, Remington had dated his sketch of a Spanish cavalry scouting party January 17 at Havana, probably drawn while he was awaiting passage back to the United States. It appeared on the front page of the February 2 *Examiner*. So it isn’t likely he had departed the previous day. Remington probably returned on the steamship *Olivette*, the ship that had transported Davis and himself to Havana. *Olivette* arrived at Key West and Tampa from Havana on January 21. The *Examiner*’s January 24 brief note about Remington’s return is datelined “NEW YORK, January 23.”

Denying journalism’s role in history

Campbell’s contrarian gambit about the Remington-Hearst exchange launched his larger project—to reject the consensus opinion that newspapers have changed the course of history. He refuses to grant Hearst his due as a bellicose imperialist warmonger determined to have his way because his (Campbell’s) ideological agenda is to deny that the press could have influenced McKinley’s decision to blockade and invade Cuba.

To Campbell, the American war with Spain was the inevitable consequence of conflicts between Spain and the United States that Hearst could not have affected, as though the public debate between pro- and anti-interventionists in newspapers and magazines, stimulated by vivid reports and images from the scenes of conflict, made no difference to the outcome.

Few academic scholars whom Campbell invokes in his myth-busting mission share his counterfactual beliefs that the mass media have not significantly influenced events—Edward R. Murrow’s broadcasts did not alter attitudes about Joseph McCarthy; Walter Cronkite’s reporting did not reduce public support for Lyndon Johnson’s war in Vietnam; Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein deserve scant credit for bringing Richard Nixon’s presidency to an end; and so forth.

I can scarcely wait to read his takedown of the Pentagon Papers, his dismissal of Jason Berry’s reports on pedophile priests, his refusal to credit the *National Enquirer* for laying Gary Hart and John Edwards low, and his denial that Judith Miller’s *New York Times* reports enabled George W. Bush’s weapons-of-mass-destruction deceptions.

Even so, unless we think Campbell has been trolling us for 20 years, we must guess that his belief he has confirmed his Hearst-telegram-denial hypothesis represents an extraordinary example of uninhibited confirmation bias, bereft of editorial skepticism or review by his publishers’ fact-checkers. After all, if his footnotes and bibliographies are honest, Campbell has studied nearly everything that I have cited here, with the possible exception of Hedda Hopper’s columns, but he has never conceded that these sources contradict his conclusion.

Campbell failed to test the credibility of Hearst Senior’s 1907 “clotted nonsense” cable to London, or Hearst Junior’s denial in his 1994 book, but he relied on both, directly and indirectly, as references he cited to support his inferences. He began with a preconceived proposition that news media cannot and do not significantly influence history, then rooted around for scraps of evidence to support his conjecture while brushing aside those that don’t.

Recapitulation

Creelman summarized his and Hearst's journalistic canon in this passage of *On the Great Highway*:

If the war against Spain is justified in the eyes of history, then "yellow journalism" deserves its place among the most useful instrumentalities of civilization. It may be guilty of giving the world a lop-sided view of events by exaggerating the importance of a few things and ignoring others, it may offend the eye by typographical violence, it may sometimes proclaim its own deeds too loudly; but it has never deserted the cause of the poor and downtrodden; it has never taken bribes,—and that is more than can be said of its critics.

Hearst's telegram to Remington, and Creelman's reports of it, conformed with those conceits.

Taking account of the incomplete record that survives today, a preponderance of available evidence ought to persuade an unbiased jury of intelligent skeptics that William Randolph Hearst sent, and told James Creelman he had sent, a telegram to Frederic Remington in Havana in January 1897 that said, in effect, but probably with more substantial and possibly circumspect wording, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the war."

The determination expressed in Hearst's trenchant phrase "I'll furnish the war" aptly embodied the plan he shared with Remington and Davis before sending them off to Cuba, and reflected the conviction he hoped Remington would consider as the reason to remain there.

Author's favor:

As a wry salute to Charles Foster Kane's last word (and to William Randolph Hearst's pet name for his paramour's most private blossom) the feisty 1971-1978 magazine, (*MORE*): *A Journalism Review*, called its accolade for excellence "Rosebud."

The July 1974 issue of (*MORE*) honored me in its Rosebud tribute for my work as Deep South correspondent and co-editor of *The Southern Patriot*, monthly newspaper published by the Southern Conference Educational Fund: "With a sensitive yet practical approach, and a clear and factual tone, the *Patriot* exemplifies advocacy journalism practiced responsibly and well." After 45 years, that remains a reminder of my goal as a writer, not always achieved.

The causes Hearst advocated in the 1890s were a pole apart from the ones I have supported, as his sensational style was the converse of my tone. But neither he nor his reporters were mere bystanders and stenographers. They meddled, and in doing so they directed and influenced the events they covered. Those are the lessons symbolized by the Remington-Hearst 1897 telegrams.