

Spanish-American War for Cuba's Independence

By the end of the 1800s, Spain had lost all of its New World colonies except Cuba and Puerto Rico. Many Cubans did not wish to be under Spanish rule, so they fled to Florida and other parts of the United States. At the same time, however, they still remained loyal to Cuba. Jose Marti, a Cuban writer living in New York, came to Tampa to gain supporters to help Cuba fight for its independence from Spain. Jose Marti was the leader of the revolution, but he was killed when he went back to Cuba to fight in it. Tomas Estrada Palma became the new leader and later the President of Cuba.

The United States watched with interest as Cuba struggled for independence. The United States had millions of dollars invested in businesses in Cuba and there were many U.S. citizens in residence there. The U.S. also traded goods with Cuba.



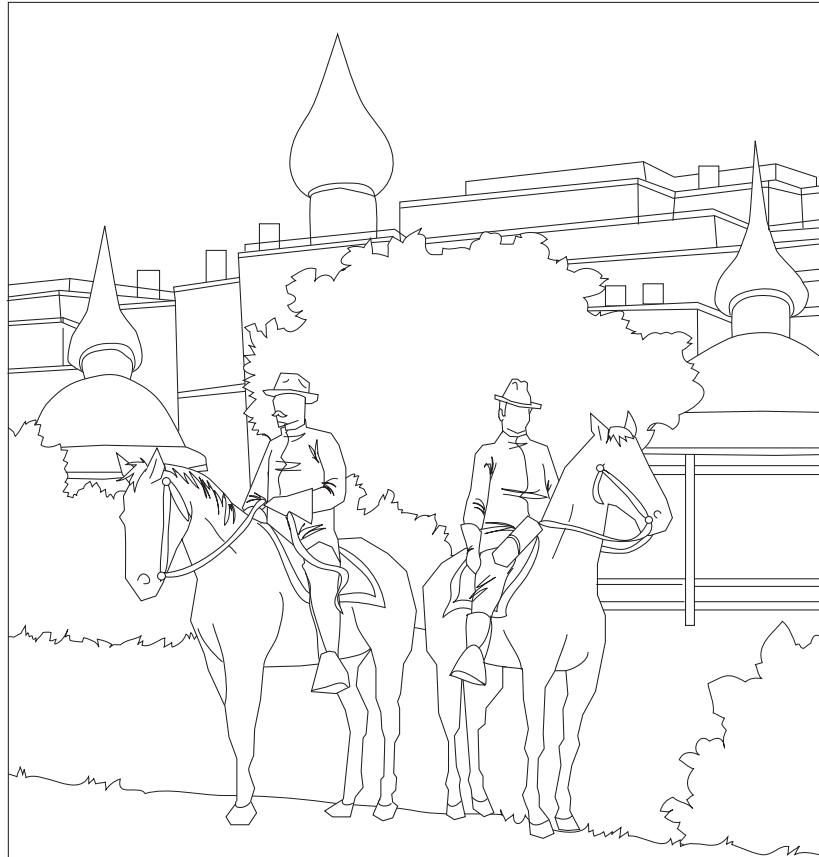
Many Florida cities were used as military bases in the Spanish-American War.

In 1898, the United States assisted in war to protect its citizens and businesses in Cuba. This war was known as the Spanish-American War. The United States declared war on Spain after the U.S. warship, the Maine, exploded and sank on February 15, 1898 while visiting Havana, Cuba. No one really knows what caused the warship to explode, but the United States blamed Spain. Thousands of United States troops fought in Cuba. The cities of Tampa, Jacksonville, Fernandina, Lakeland, Pensacola, Key West, and Miami were used as military bases for the American troops.

Although most of the fighting took place in Cuba, the first major battle was not fought there. It was fought half way around the world in the harbor of Manila. Manila is located in the Philippine Islands, which were then ruled by Spain. The U.S. fleet, led by Commodore George Dewey, defeated the Spanish fleet there.

Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders went to Cuba to help in the fighting. The Rough Riders were a group of cowboys and college athletes. Theodore Roosevelt later became governor of New York and then president of the United States.

The Spanish-American War lasted only a few months and was over when Spain signed a peace treaty giving the United States control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippine Islands, and Guam. Cuba, however, became an independent country rather than a U.S. territory.



Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders practiced their riding skills on the lawn of the Tampa Hotel.