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# Hypertext Scholarship and Media Studies

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## Hypertext Scholarship and Media Studies

James Castonguay

In "The Spanish-American War in U.S. Media Culture," I attempt to exploit some of the potential of the Internet and World Wide Web for media and cultural studies scholarship and pedagogy. The article examines the mediation of the Spanish-American War by focusing on early film spectatorship and the public sphere, the emergence of *fin-de-siècle* mass culture in the United States, and ideologies of nation, race, and gender in Spanish-American War discourses. By drawing from primary sources (e.g., African American and Euro-American newspapers in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Indiana, Georgia, and South Carolina), I construct various contexts--regional, historical, political, theoretical, intertextual--to examine the ways film, newspapers, and other media contributed to the cultural production of the Spanish-American War. The presentation thus uses the newer technology of the Internet to explore older technologies and media like film and print in the 1890s.

The World Wide Web allows media and cultural studies scholars to incorporate objects of study into their writings in ways previously unavailable through traditional print publications (e.g., academic journals and books). Although other forms of computer mediated communication such as CD-Roms and DVD use multimedia and hypertext, I envisioned from the beginning of my project several years ago that the research would be presented on the Internet in order to reach an audience that might not otherwise read, or have access to, the article in these other formats (in addition, of course, to a more traditional readership).

The presentation draws extensively from the digitized film collections available from the Library of Congress's Web site. Internet users may download and view several Spanish-American War films while they continue to read the article, either by linking to the MPEG and QuickTime movie files at the Library of Congress, or by streaming RealMedia versions I have encoded for slower modem connections. From a media studies perspective, incorporating these films into an online presentation is a clear enhancement over a static print publication. As I continue to revise and expand the article, my goal is to offer hypertext-rich analyses of every Spanish-American War film available in the National Digital Library's growing collection. In addition to this exciting opportunity to incorporate entire films, I was also able to include many more illustrations from newspapers--and frame enlargements from films--than would have been possible in a traditional print piece.

In addition to these practical presentational advantages, the Web also lends itself to the intertextual methodology employed in the article to investigate the Spanish-American War. Indeed, the early cinema's mode of production and reception, especially its emphasis on intermediality in the late 1890s, is inordinately well-suited to the link-based method of hypertext that underpins the structure of the Web. I hope that my article at least begins to reconstruct some sense of the vertiginous excess of Spanish-American War texts in ways that a linear print piece could not. And although

there are important historical and textual differences among film, television, and the Internet, I also feel that my study of the mediation of the Spanish-American War has heuristic value for cultural studies scholars interested in gauging the possibilities for consumers of popular culture to "resist" or "negotiate" the messages of various media within different historical contexts. I would also argue that the Internet's "place" in the hierarchy of 1990s media culture is analogous in important ways to the emerging technology of commercial cinema in the 1890s. As my discussion of the earliest cinema hopefully demonstrates, when one considers the sheer intertextual dissemination of Spanish-American War signifiers and the war's promotion and/or commodification through newspaper wire services, public bulletin boards, private telegraph wires, vaudeville and film, the war with Spain becomes homologous to the cultural production and mediation of the neoimperialist Operation Desert Storm.

It seems to me that as we debate the value of hypertext scholarship we should avoid the kind of crude technological and economic determinism that often leads either to a valorization of the Internet as democracy actualized, or to a condemnation of the Internet and the World Wide Web as inescapably classist, sexist, and racist technologies. It is my hope that my consideration of the Spanish-American War in U.S. media culture may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of new media technologies by grounding them historically in relation to other media and other U.S. wars. I note in the article, for instance, that the historical mode of film reception and the cinematic public sphere in the late nineteenth century opened up possibilities for ideological resistance, unlike, say, the production and distribution of pre-censored images of the Persian Gulf War on television nearly a century later. With the development and continued growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the late 1990s, however, one could argue that there are renewed opportunities for resistance, activism, and critical media pedagogy through this new mode of public discourse at this important historical moment. It is in this spirit that my article was written, and I would like to conclude by reiterating that "The Spanish-American War in U.S. Media Culture" is a dialogic project that will continue to evolve in response to comments and criticisms I receive through this print forum, the online discussion area, or email. Although progressive politics do not inhere in the Internet, hypertext, or interactivity, it is my hope that this experimental project, like the H-AMSTDY email list ( <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~amstdy/> ) and the American Studies Crossroads Project ( <http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/> ), will facilitate a sense of academic community and foster critically constructive conversation.