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John Lawrence Tone, War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898

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The word "genocide" was not coined until the end of World War II, but it appears in the title of John Lawrence Tone's book to describe what happened in Cuba during the tragic war for independence at the end of the nineteenth century. Tone joins a lengthening list of historians who use the term to describe events that occurred long before the mid-twentieth century. He does not clarify the meaning or go into detail about this supposed genocide until the latter part of the book, which distracts the reader's attention from the many other worthwhile parts of this study. The reconcentration policies carried out by the Spanish commander, General Weyler, led to what Tone estimates as 100,000 deaths from a combination of starvation and epidemic disease. The suffering was terrible, but even though it was presented in the tabloid press of the United States as something later generations would label genocide, that was not the purpose of the Spanish policy of reconcentration. The suffering and deaths added to the dimensions of this Caribbean tragedy.

Tone makes extensive use of Spanish military archives in this first rate study of the war, and he certainly does not hesitate to offer new judgments on the various participants. He has written a welcome, concise history of the Cuban War for Independence in which he succeeds in setting out clearly the complexities of this prolonged war of liberation that turned out to be a tragedy, in one form or another, for both the Cubans and the Spanish. Tone believes
that the greatest tragedy was Cuba's fate at the end of the war when it became "a neocolonial dependency" of the United States.

He quickly dismisses Cuban nationalist historiography that suggests that Cubans would have won the war against Spain without United States intervention. He argues that neither Spain's defeat nor Cuban independence were "structurally determined or inevitable" (p. 13). The Cubans "fought courageously, but they could not win the war on their own" (p. 11). Until the United States intervention in 1898, Tone characterizes the war as one of "numerous small battles with low casualties" (p. 80). The Spanish army, however, which was woefully unprepared for the type of warfare it had to fight in Cuba, as Tone demonstrates, suffered terrible losses. Twenty-two percent of the Spanish army sent out to the island, or some 41,000 soldiers, died from disease, far more than were killed in battle. It was also a war of savage reprisals and brutality on both sides in which, arguably, the Cuban civilians were the real victims.

Tone's final chapter is an excellent, brief summary of the story of the United States invasion and defeat of Spain in 1898. He succeeds in showing how the war that was fought to liberate Cuba from Spanish colonialism has, in his words, "to be read as a story of disaster for Cubans" (p. 285). He points out as well that this war also "bore its rotten fruit for decades to come in Spain" (p. 287). The long-term consequences for Spain came in addition to what he describes as the loss of "an army, a fleet, and an empire" in the three years between 1895 and 1898. More than a hundred years later, and at a time when Cuba once more is on the verge of possible historic change, this is a book that deserves a wide audience, especially in the three countries that were involved in this failed war of liberation.

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Brazil's second empire emerged from the tumultuous decade of the 1830s, when the teen-aged Prince Pedro was crowned in 1840. His subsequent reign has been treated gently by historians as a time of modernization under the benevolent watch of the emperor. Successful policies—like political stability, economic expansion, technological progress, and gradual elimination of African slavery—are generally credited to the emperor's judicious guidance of his collaborators in Parliament and provincial governments. Jeffrey