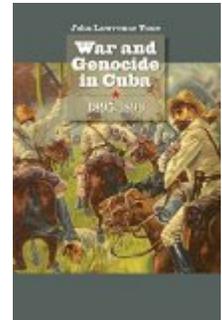


**John Lawrence Tone.** *War and Genocide in Cuba 1895-1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. 338 pp. \$28.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3006-2.



**Reviewed by** Jonathan Krohn

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John Lawrence Tone's masterful account of the events that culminated in the Spanish-American War presents a fascinating and captivating account of a little known episode in the evolution of modern warfare and insurgency. For those who agree with the adage that those who do not know their history are bound to repeat it, Tone presents a stark reminder from history of the cost of insurgency and wars. This is a must read, not only for scholars interested in the time period, but for anyone who is concerned with current global conflicts and the human rights of noncombatants. Tone's work avoids a traditional narrative of battles and campaigns to engage the reader in the tragic consequences of war and will appeal to a broad audience.

Tone takes great effort to present both the Cuban and Spanish sides to the story. That both sides sacrificed Cuban civilians to achieve their goals is seen by Tone as foreshadowing greater atrocities to come (p. 8). By the time the Americans arrived in 1898, the Cuban revolutionaries were no longer able to effectively resist. However, political changes in Spain and economic problems

did not allow the Spanish to take advantage of the situation in Cuba and this proved ripe for American intervention.

As the war for Cuban independence continued, both the revolutionaries and the Spanish ratcheted up the pressure on civilians to choose sides. Regardless of their choice, death from the opposition, starvation, or disease awaited a significant proportion of the civilian population. Development of the conditions that resulted in this tremendous hardship for the civilian population makes Tone's work an important read. At best, most historians may know of the reputation of the Spanish general Valeriano Weyler as "the Butcher," but few have any understanding of the conditions that resulted in his involvement in this war, and the conditions that forced him to implement, the policy of reconcentration of civilians. Through use of Cuban sources, Tone discovers that the revolutionary leaders Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez first devised the policy to force civilians to choose. Either they relocated to the east side of the islands, where the Cubans controlled the mountainous terrain, or they would be accused of

supporting the Spanish and be subject to immediate trial and execution. The idea that Cuba had to be destroyed before it could be re-created became known as a "war of redemption" (p. 91). While Tone agrees that the governor of Cuba, General Weyler, practiced brutal tactics, he also points out that they were effective. It was the press war that Weyler lost. Since most newspaper reporters were unwilling to travel to Cuba, most they relied on Cuban nationals living in New York or Miami for information that was often untrue, painting the Cubans as winning and only the Spanish as being brutal. While records for civilian deaths are limited, Tone compares multiple sources to conclude that between 25 and 30 percent of the civilian population subjected to reconcentration died during this three-year period.

Tone utilizes his strength as a European historian specializing in modern Spain in analyzing newly released archival evidence from Spanish military records, along with Cuban and Spanish newspapers. Tone discovered that the Spanish returned much of the evidence to Spain, which enabled him to examine many of the sources while working on other research in Spanish archives. His bibliography also includes extensive work done by both Spanish and Cuban authors.

Given Tone's access and work with Spanish sources, one is surprised to find little development of the response on the Spanish home front. Many scholars of the period view the reluctance of the Spanish government to negotiate a settlement with the United States being due to the public support in Spain to keep Cuba.[1] In most cases, Tone's references to the Spanish home front demonstrate ambivalence in Spain to the situation in Cuba. Tone's silence on the home front raises this as an issue that other scholars need to pursue to determine if there may be other causes for the reluctance of Spain to negotiate.

Tone does make some minor omissions and oversights that can detract at times from his otherwise excellent analysis. For example, he consid-

ers it "scandalous" that the Spanish lost 22 percent of their army to disease between 1895 and 1898, but that the Americans only lost 3 percent of their forces sent in 1898 (p. 97). Tone does not account for the fact that Spanish losses came over three years and the American losses came over only three months. One would expect an author that has written about the Napoleon Wars to be aware of the French and British losses of nearly 60 percent earlier in the century, in St. Domingue, due to tropical diseases and a climate similar to Cuba. Given the weakness of the Spanish support for the troops and the often starvation conditions due to the total war conducted by both sides, the toll from disease is remarkably low when considering the state of medical knowledge regarding yellow fever and malaria.

Another topic, which Tone skims over, involves American support for the Cubans. Tone often alludes to support by Cuban nationals living in the United States, but never develops this aspect in any detail beyond discussing how they fed information to the press. One wonders who they were, how they operated, and what their connections were in both private and government affairs. For example, Tone points out that the Cubans used explosive bullets banned by international convention, but does not identify how or where the Cubans obtained these bullets (p. 130).

Tone finds himself in a quandary over the tactics employed against civilians. He understands the tactical advantage gained by both parties in forcing civilians to relocate and to prevent them from supporting the opponent. While the massive human tragedy haunts his narrative, Tone never reconciles his position on whether total war was justified. Despite his detailed account of the tragic conditions and human suffering, Tone does not appear to conclude, as Robert Kagan does, that American involvement was the result of humanitarian concerns.[2] Instead Tone continues to subscribe to the idea that jingoist political support (p.

210) and the "yellow press" (p. 220) served as the reasons for American involvement.[3]

These omissions and oversights do not detract from the overall impact of understanding this little-known conflict and Tone does an excellent job of presenting the viewpoint of both the Cubans and the Spanish fairly. The Spanish lost just over four thousand troops killed in combat. This number would be equaled in a few years by the American encounter with Filipino insurgents between 1899-1902. The civilian losses in Cuba present an even more compelling number, between 155,000 and 170,000 deaths representing nearly 10 percent of the total population. These high civilian casualties would also be repeated in the Philippines. Humanitarian concerns raised over the Spanish use of reconcentration camps for civilians would be repeated in the political opposition to William McKinley's policies when the same tactic was used in the Philippines a few years later. Tone helps to take us beyond the cry of "Remember the *Maine*" to the brutal reality and humanitarian concerns from the prior three years that resulted in American intervention.

#### Notes

[1]. See recent works by Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 357-416; Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 87-142; and David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 31-34.

[2]. Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 391.

[3]. See Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) as a common example of scholarship that looks beyond the direct statements of McKinley and others stating that humanitarian concerns were their primary motivation. Or see Walter

LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963, 1998) for the view of economic interests as the dominant factor.

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