

JOHN LAWRENCE TOME: *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

In recent years, the work of Louis Pérez (*Cuba between Empires; Cuba after the Platt Amendment*) has dominated the historiography of the U.S.-Spanish-Cuban War. In Pérez's telling, the Cuban revolutionaries, committed to achieving comprehensive social and economic reform on the island, were on the verge of independence—before the United States sent troops to uphold U.S. economic and cultural influence in Cuba.

John Lawrence Tome, a military historian at Georgia Tech, suggests instead that the Cubans were on the verge of defeat, not victory, in early 1897, and were saved only by international developments. He disagrees with Pérez and other revisionist scholars of the American empire in contending that events of 1895-1898, not broader developments in the post-1865 world, explained the decisions made by U.S., Spanish, and Cuban policymakers. He raises questions about the extent of popular support the revolutionaries enjoyed. And his dismissal of “the notion that the conflict in Cuba was inevitable and its outcome preordained” is intriguing.

“Revolutions,” writes Tome, “are most likely to succeed when the ruling elite is weak, divided, and hesitant, a condition that can lead to a failure of nerve and morale among police and military forces who then fail to employ deadly force at some key early juncture.” (p. 46) That situation certainly applied to Cuba. Local elites divided between those demanding autonomy and those who wanted absolute acceptance of Spanish rule. The Spanish government itself was inconsistent on this score, with the Liberals preferring autonomy and the Conservatives rejecting the option.

The Cuban elite divided on other issues as well. Most whites—learning the lesson of the Haitian Revolution—feared that independence could conclude in the Africanization of Cuba. Regional differences between east and west were accentuated by the west's relative economic prosperity. The area around Havana also was more sympathetic to Spain for demographic reasons: a wave of immigration from Spain had come to the region in the 1870s and 1880s.

But divisions—both personal and ideological—existed within the revolutionary movement as well. What Tome calls the “radical democratic vision” of José Martí borrowed from Rousseau and Jefferson. On the other hand, leading generals such as Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo—the figures celebrated as social revolutionaries with wide popular support by the Pérez school—were more authoritarian.

Tome also takes a more jaundiced view toward the military tactics of Gómez and Maceo. Their scorched-earth policies, he argues, left the revolutionaries

scarcely more concerned with civilian deaths than were the Spanish—and explained why most Cubans probably supported neither side in the conflict. Since Gómez believed that Cubans' continuing to farm and sell their products to the Spanish was critical to Spain's long-term military access, he considered the revolutionaries justified in trying to decimate Cuba's economy—to destroy the island in order to save it, to use a phrase from another guerrilla conflict.

The crucial events in the conflict's outcome, argues Tome, occurred between 1895 and 1898, and historians who portray the war as a 30-year conflict miss the importance of historical contingency during this three-year period. The Spanish suffered military setbacks, but more from disease than the prowess of Cuban forces. Between February 1895 and August 1898, more than 41,000 Spanish soldiers (22 percent of the Spanish army in Cuba) died from disease. This figure, as Tome points out, underestimates the effect of disease on Spain's fighting capability, since virtually every Spanish soldier was ill at some point in the conflict. The crippling effect of disease, moreover, was avoidable—for financial reasons, the Spanish government failed to supply its army with sufficient medicine and supplies to treat the sick. Cost concerns also left the Spanish army perpetually short of rations. And the army itself was unusually susceptible to disease, since Spanish law allowed the wealthy and middle class to buy their way out of service, resulting in an army that disproportionately consisted of poor or working-class men.

With an army ill-equipped to fight a lengthy campaign, Spanish military leaders concluded that the only way to win the war “would be to act with the utmost rigor against civilians who supported the insurrection.” (p. 121) The result was General Victoriano Weyler's “reconcentration” initiative of herding Cuban civilians into armed camps or urban areas. The policy was brutal: while the figures remain disputed, at least 150,000 civilians perished in the conflict, although, Tome adds, the Cuban Liberation Army also “had a hand in reconcentration,” by creating rural refugees who swarmed to the cities. The policy also weakened Spanish support among some quarters of the elite: for instance, sugar and tobacco plantation owners wanted special dispensations to allow their workers to remain on the plantations.

Yet Weyler's tactics had their effect. Many revolutionary leaders concluded by early 1897 that the war was unwinnable, at least absent U.S. intervention. The late 1896 death of Maceo, the revolutionaries' most accomplished general, only intensified this sense of gloom. “With him gone,” argues Tome, “what was left of the insurrection in western Cuba fell apart.” (p. 185)

How, then, did Spain lose the war? The 1897 assassination of Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas triggered a political crisis in Spain. The opposition Liberals, who came to power on an anti-Weyler platform, dismissed the general, ended his

brutal policies, and allowed the Cuban revolutionaries to rebuild their strength. Meanwhile, the Cubans' effort to trigger a U.S. intervention succeeded—and, to the surprise of at least some military observers, the Spanish forces proved no match for their U.S. foes. But these specific events of 1895-1898, not broader trends, explain the conflict's outcome.

Tome is at his strongest in discussing the military aspects of the war; he is somewhat less convincing when suggesting that a Spanish victory was strongly possible as late as 1897. Weyler's tactics in many ways were doomed to fail, since they were politically unsustainable, as the Spanish government discovered.

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**EDUARDO GONZÁLEZ: *Cuba and the Tempest: Literature & Cinema in the Time of Diaspora*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.**

En su esperado último libro, *Cuba and the Tempest: Literature & Cinema in the Time of Diaspora*, Eduardo González se aparta de la perspectiva nacional con que la literatura cubana, paradójicamente, ha sido leída de manera más insistente. Digo paradójicamente porque el corpus literario vinculado a Cuba siempre ha mostrado, de forma más visible que en la literatura de otras partes de Latinoamérica, las huellas que hacen evidente la inadecuación y las limitaciones de la perspectiva nacional para entender la cultura cubana misma. Alejado completamente de los estudios que recapitulan linealmente lo producido en el país, *Cuba and the Tempest* reniega, casi sin hacer mención de ella, de esa perspectiva nacional y restituye, a través de una serie de lecturas que combinan sofisticación teórica, erudición y complejidad argumentativa, el entramado literario, filosófico y cultural, europeo y poscolonial, con el que es posible correlacionar escritores y textos "cubanos". El efecto general del estudio de González es el de descubanizar la literatura cubana al leerla fuera del marco nacional en el que, a pesar de su fluidez y extraterritorialidad, ha sido usualmente confinada.

El libro está organizado en tres partes que corresponden a tres recorridos u odiseas, en donde se analiza el concepto de autoría romántica en relación a tres autores cubanos fundamentales del período post-1959: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Antonio Benítez Rojo y Leonardo Padura Fuentes. Sería imposible en esta breve reseña seguir cada uno de los pasos del análisis de González a lo largo de los doce capítulos que integran *Cuba & the Tempest*, pero quiero insistir en la variedad de materiales de los que se sirve (mitos y relatos folclóricos; textos literarios, fílmicos, filosóficos y científicos) para discutir y alumbrar la incidencia de la autoría romántica dentro de la literatura cubana. González no se preocupa en