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The War Of 1898: The United States And Cuba In History And Historiography



Synopsis

A century after the Cuban war for independence was fought, Louis Perez examines the meaning of the war of 1898 as represented in one hundred years of American historical writing. Offering both a critique of the conventional historiography and an alternate history of the war informed by Cuban sources, Perez explores the assumptions that have shaped our understanding of the "Spanish-American War"--a construct, he argues, that denies the Cubans' participation in their own struggle for liberation from Spanish rule. Perez examines historical accounts of the destruction of the battleship Maine, the representation of public opinion as a precipitant of war, and the treatment of the military campaign in Cuba. Equally important, he shows how historical narratives have helped sustain notions of America's national purpose and policy, many of which were first articulated in 1898. Cuba insinuated itself into one of the most important chapters of U.S. history, and what happened on the island in the final decade of the nineteenth century--and the way in which what happened was subsequently represented--has had far-reaching implications, many of which continue to resonate today.

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This slender volume develops in greater detail Perez's thesis, advanced in his earlier work, *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*, that the powers in Washington orchestrated the Spanish-American war, not to bring freedom to the Cubans, but to get control of this strategically located island.

Basically, he asks "where are the Cubans in the American histories of the war?" He provides ample

evidence that with rare exceptions, American historians have treated the Cuban insurrectionists as less than useless to the American effort, which although was not brilliant, was far less inept than the defensive efforts of the Spanish army. Perez provides evidence that the insurrectos were critical to the American campaign. Although the US military leaders at the time and some American historians have wondered why the Spanish failed to have defensive positions at the most likely landing points for the Americans, Perez points out that over 1500 insurrectos had secured these areas so that the Americans could land unopposed. Further, the relief column of 3750 men which set out on a 160 mile march to reinforce the Spanish garrison at Santiago de Cuba arrived too late and too exhausted to do any good. Why? Not because of Spanish sloth, but because throughout the course of its march, it was attacked, ambushed, and harassed by a much smaller Cuban force which delayed the column for the four days that saw the US forces overrun the Spanish positions at El Caney and San Juan. The author argues that the Cuban insurrection (which began in earnest in 1895) had already brought the Spanish army to the brink of defeat. In short, the Cubans had all but won their independence when the Americans appeared on the scene to "rescue" them.

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