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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.

## Book Information

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[Draws] from his [Perez's] vast and detailed knowledge of both primary and secondary sources."Historian"A provocative reinterpretation that will undoubtedly influence subsequent writing about the war."Latin American Research Review"[A] probing and provocative critique of the North American historiographical treatment of the conflict."Pacific Historical Review"We have indeed been

well served both professionally and publicly by Perez's critical reappraisal of 1898 and its significations."The Americas"•Draws• from his •Perez's• vast and detailed knowledge of both primary and secondary sources."Historian"•A• probing and provocative critique of the North American historiographical treatment of the conflict."Pacific Historical Review"Elegantly written and crammed with the ideas and insights of a master historian."Latin American Studies"

A rich review of the literature and sources of the 1898 war, *The War of 1898: Between History and Historiography* commands authority and will become the standard work to which scholars turn.--Thomas G. Paterson, University of ConnecticutOne hundred years after the conflict, the publication of Perez's work forms another significant contribution to Cuban history. It is comprehensive in its review of historical writing on the war and well balanced on the main aspects of the conflict. Scholars of both American and Caribbean history will no doubt find the text refreshing and stimulating.--Journal of Caribbean HistoryA provocative reinterpretation that will undoubtedly influence subsequent writing about the war.--Latin American Research ReviewLouis A. Perez, Jr., who brings extensive research, thought, and writing to this task, renders a probing and provocative critique of the North American historiographical treatment of the conflict. . . . In this exhaustively researched, lucidly argued essay, Perez contributes significantly to an understanding of both the history and the historiography of the War of 1898.--Pacific Historical ReviewPerez sets the record straight.--International History ReviewNo serious student of the 1890s and after can ignore this book; it will have important implications for all those who study post-1895 U.S.-Cuban relations. Just about everyone who has written monographs on the 1898 war or--especially--American history or U.S. diplomatic textbooks is going to have to do some extensive rewrites as a result of this book.--Walter LaFeber, Cornell University[A] tightly-written examination of the import of the Spanish-Cuban-United States War of 1898. . . . We have indeed been well served both professionally and publicly by Perez's critical reappraisal of 1898 and its significations.--The AmericasPerez's study is a refreshing and balanced addition to the literature. Focusing not only on 1898 but also on its place in history, he performs the admirable task of exploring and analyzing the events in their greater context. The book is lucid, well documented, and balanced. . . . This is a model study in a handsome edition that is unusually attractive in its graphic layout.--Choice[This] short, clearly argued volume is an analysis of the relationship between Cuba and the United States . . . in both 'history and historiography.' Drawing from his vast and detailed knowledge of both primary and secondary sources, Perez narrates both the way the war progressed in Cuba and the way it has been interpreted in the United States.--HistorianThe incomparable Louis A. Perez, Jr. has

written a stimulating perspective on U.S.-Cuban relationships based on nineteenth-century perspectives and historiographical literature. . . . This work is recommended for students of Cuban history and the general reader.--Colonial Latin American Historical Review

The War of 1898 is a brilliant frontal assault on the generations of scholars who have offered this modern American creation myth as history. . . . [Perez's] analysis is the most thorough, persuasive, and nuanced to date.--Raleigh News & Observer

Elegantly written and crammed with the ideas and insights of a master historian. It provides an extremely thorough and perceptive critique of the historical literature on the war that will be stimulating and required reading for anyone who writes on or teaches this particular topic. . . . An excellent study which will certainly accelerate the historiographical trend.--Latin American Studies

Perez has hit on the soft underbelly of U.S. policy in 1898, which U.S. historians have often tended to repress.--New York Review of Books

Perez has provided us with a brief, detailed recounting of the extent to which historical studies of what he correctly calls the 'Spanish-Cuban-American War' of 1898 were influenced by contemporary U.S. accounts of that conflict, which took credit for having brought freedom to the Cuban people. In correcting that bias, Perez gives considerable space to the work of Cuban scholars, who insist that the U.S. 'victory' was made possible only by the ongoing insurgency by rebels against Spanish rule, and that the self-proclaimed idealism of the American incursion was in fact a mask for intervention in and control of Cuban internal affairs. This is an impressive, enlightening survey and an important addition to the very long shelf of works inspired by this 'neglected' war.--John Seelye, University of Florida

great stuff

This book is well researched and draws on first hand accounts of the Spanish American War. The advocacy is indicative of retribution for an injustice the United States brought upon Cuba.

In this well researched work, Mr. Perez examines the Cuban chapter of the War of 1898. (Historians now prefer 'War of 1898' instead of 'Spanish-American War' to avoid confussing the issues in Cuba and Philippeans which led to war.) He does this from a Cuba-centric point of view; a breath of fresh air for those sick of American ethnocentric views of history. Historically documents show the U.S.'s prime motive was preventing another European power from assuming colonial control of Cuba; hence having a power base close to America. History also clearly shows Cuba defeating the Spanish-- until the U.S. stormed in to 'help.' Those who like to live with blinders over their eyes and believe legends and myths about US Glory (i.e. the Rough Riders etc.) will not like this book.

However, those who want the truth to be preserved instead of propaganda will enjoy. The book can be read quickly, but offers more than enough detailed information to be used as reference in scholarly writings. In light of a previous review I must add the book sticks to the relevant subject; not propaganda for Castro. Castro only gets mentioned on 3 of the last few pages. His revolution was against elites placed into power by the US in 1904. Perez simply restates that fact after explaining the process that turned control of Cuba to Cuba. Perez also leaves the Maine incident as mystery because IT IS A MYSTERY! There is nothing worse than a historian claiming unknowns as 100% fact-- it degrades the intellectual integrity of historical research. Perez explores each theory but leaves the final question unanswered. This book raised the standard for research into US involvement in Cuba from 1898-1904.

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. The Cubans were excluded from any of the negotiations for the surrender of Santiago, and were prohibited from entering the city. Spanish officials were kept in office pending the final peace settlement. General Shafter baldly informed the insurrecto commander, Calixio Garcia, that the war was between the USA and the Kingdom of Spain, and the surrender was made solely to the American army. So,

according to Perez, the US went to war not to free the Cubans, but to realize ambitions going back to the days of Jefferson to gain control of the island. Reports of Spanish abuses, embellished and trumpeted by the press, outraged the public, so that by 1898, there was a popular desire to go to war. That the McKinley administration consciously but secretly manipulated this outrage to get a war on its terms, is asserted by Perez, but in my eyes, not proven. Certainly the sinking of the Maine was a god-send to the war party and made McKinley's path easier if his oft-stated reluctance to war was pure mendacity. At any rate, our selective recall of history and memory has contributed to creating a large gulf between Americans and Cubans. Believing that we spent treasure and blood to free these people, we cannot help thinking that the tumultuous years since 1898 have been years of Cuban ingratitude. It's time that the Cuban side of the story gets told, so that Americans and Cubans can share a common history about the events of 1898. Perez provides extensive notes, but no bibliography. A methodical, bibliographic essay focusing on how American historians have treated the war would have been most helpful.

Louis Perez can hardly be faulted for not doing his reading. He leaves scarcely a stone unturned in his survey of the historiography of 1898. Yet this book falls far short of its potential. I suspect the reason for this is both political and methodological. Perez writes from the left and he focuses on Cuba. Nothing is wrong with either, however, taken together these produce a skewed and inaccurate description of American policy in 1898. Perez criticizes his predecessors for thinking that they can write about Cuba from an American perspective. He makes the same mistake, however, in thinking that his command of Cuban history gives him some kind of special insight into McKinley's motivations. The academic left has generally had little to offer studies of the Spanish-American War. Julius Pratt's *Expansionists of 1898* blew their argument out of the water by arguing that American businesses did not want war with Spain. That hasn't kept authors like Perez from trying to cast McKinley as some kind of scheming imperialist. One does not have to be a fan of McKinley to find this characterization inaccurate. It is underpinned by entirely circumstantial evidence. Worse, it is contradicted by McKinley's biographers, and by accounts which emphasize the extraordinary pressure that the President faced in March of 1898. Perez writes snidely and dismissively of the impact of the explosion of the U.S.S. Maine, while refusing to offer his own theory of the impact of the event. He never directly refutes the accounts emphasizing the Maine, he just makes it clear that he really dislikes them. Perez' conclusion - which makes Fidel Castro one of the few heroes of the book - does little to redeem this overly political, snidely written, and surprisingly incomplete text.

This book is a very tough read. It is written for a highly educated audience and is hard to follow. The book is poorly written, jumps around, and is not entirely factual. There are better books on The Spanish American War than this one.

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