



Stucki, Andreas: *Las Guerras de Cuba: Violencia y campos de concentración (1868-1898)*. Madrid, La Esfera de los Libros, 2017. 413 pp.

There are better cultural, political, and military histories of this period, but Andreas Stucki's sustained focus on Spanish military doctrine and practice, particularly the reconcentration of civilians, sets this book apart and makes it invaluable.

The scholarship on reconcentration has been scant for several reasons. Cuban scholars traditionally stopped at demonizing Weyler and the Spanish in order to justify their commitment to "Total War." Americans, with exceptions, do the same thing in order to paint the invasion of Cuba and other Spanish colonies in 1898 as a rescue operation. In both cases, deeper explorations of the way Cuban civilians were treated would reveal too much about the role of the Cuban insurgents in the tragedy and confuse the convenient narrative about good Cubans and evil Spaniards. Spanish scholars have had little interest in examining too closely a frankly disgraceful part of the history of modern Spain and sometimes approach the subject apologetically. As a result, most people are unaware that reconcentration predated the arrival of Weyler in 1896, and that it began organically when both sides, Cuban and Spanish, fought to control the population and its resources. Cubans burned crops and Spanish towns, forcing civilians to flee into cities or join them in the manigua (pp. 87-88). The Spanish burned crops and Cuban towns and forced civilians to relocate to Spanish-held territory (pp. 185-189). One of Stucki's most interesting contributions is the attention he gives to the problem of the vast internal migration not caused by reconcentration but simply by the cruelty of warfare. In a sense, Weyler's famous orders of reconcentration were simply a more radical version of what had already been happening. It had happened before in Cuba and elsewhere and it will happen again, because it is part of the nature of insurgency and counterinsurgency (pp. 10-11). This is not to let Weyler "off the hook," as it were, but simply to place him in some kind of context that makes him and the Spanish regime in Cuba human and therefore understandable.

Scholars sometimes make the mistake of conflating reconcentration with the concentration camps and gulags of the twentieth century (pp. 13-16). In fact, what happened in Cuba was completely different, as Stucki argues. It resulted in great suffering and death. Perhaps ten percent of the population perished (10). Spanish officials bear responsibility for this in that they knew from experience that this would be the case, for they could not possibly provide adequate rations and they could not understand, much less prevent the diseases that sickened and killed the starving civilian population. Despite all of this, however, reconcentration was a military strategy, not deliberate murder. The "camps" were mostly just defensible towns (p. 17). Stucki notes that the term concentration camp was not really used in Cuba. Instead, terms like "pueblos reconcentrados" and "concentrados en ciudades" were common. And Stucki rightly prefers to use "poblados fortificados" to describe the "camps" and

“reubicación” to describe the process of moving civilians into them. In this context, the title in Spanish is a rather odd translation of the 2013 German original. *Aufstand und Zwangsumsiedlung: Die Kubanischen Unabhängigkeitskriege* can be translated to English as *Rebellion and Forced Relocation: The Cuban Wars of Independence*. Given his discussion of the inappropriate use of the term “concentration camp,” one wonders if Stucki would have preferred some other title in Spanish.

Reconcentration was not managed in any systematic way. It varied from province to province and town to town. Sometimes, towns built barracks to house civilians. Others allowed new suburbs to be created. In some towns, reconcentrados slept inside old warehouses or other empty buildings. In others, they slept in the open. In some towns, they were guarded closely. In others, they freely left during the day to farm, pasture livestock, and engage in other sorts of activities designed to sustain themselves. Sometimes, but not always, if their property had not already been destroyed by the Cubans, the Spanish allowed them to bring it along. The Spanish army provided rations to the reconcentrados, but it was an inefficient and underfunded system that barely worked in some places and it was discontinued too soon as part of winding down reconcentration under Blanco in late 1897. In any event, all of this bears little resemblance to the camps at Auschwitz or Dachau, and Stucki is right to insist on the difference.

Stucki brings some new sources to bear on his subject. Correspondence and other unpublished material from the Biblioteca Nacional in Havana and from the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Pinar del Río adds depth and texture to his work. On the other hand, I expected to see more use made of these and other Cuban archives, but very few of Stucki’s copious endnotes refer to sources in Cuba. Instead, they mostly reference well-known materials in the military archives in Madrid and Segovia. In part, I believe this is because using archives in Cuba is not an easy thing to do, as I know from experience. In part, though, it is because many of the best materials bearing on the subject were created by the Spanish and they took it all with them when they evacuated Cuba. Stucki uses this archival material to argue that the Spanish military strategy was not as foolish as it was once thought to be. One reads in some older histories that the trochas built to isolate the insurgents in the far West and in the far East did not work. Cuban documents overwhelmingly tell another story. Early in the war the old eastern trocha was a ruin and easy to cross, but by 1896 the new western trocha was extremely effective, and the eastern one in the process of becoming so (p. 173). Even reconcentration itself “worked” in the sense that by 1897 the Ejército Libertador had lost most of western Cuba, which really had become “casi-pacificada,” to use Weyler’s unfortunate term (p. 209-214). The old notion that reconcentration simply created enemies and that the trochas were a defensive measure that accomplished nothing of strategic value cannot be sustained by the evidence. On the other hand, reconcentration failed in another fundamental respect. The tragedy of reconcentration not only cost the lives of thousands of non-combatants in Cuba, it also helped to create opposition to the war in Spain and to mobilize public opinion in the United States against the Spanish regime in Cuba (p. 215). This last point should be emphasized. Two years of yellow journalism about Spanish barbarity -- real and otherwise -- played a part in the American decision to go to war with Spain.

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