

# The Humanitarian Dimensions of the American Occupation of Cuba, 1898-1902

- General Weyler initiated a policy of *reconcentration* to regain control of Cuba. This forcibly relocated Cubans including women and non-combatants into garrisons.
- These camps angered the American public and killed between an estimated 200,000 and 400,000 Cubans from disease and starvation.
- President McKinley referred to this as ‘extermination’ that went “beyond the norms of civilised warfare”

- A letter from Mr. Sherman to Mr. Woodford, Department of State, dated 1 March 1898 best describes the actions of the American people. He states: “The distressing situation of the reconcentrados has appealed very strongly to the generous heart of the American people, and under the initiative of the President every effort has been made to organize and apply systematic relief through private donations here and distribution by the available channels in Cuba. However generously our countrymen have responded to this appeal, their efforts can relieve but a very small portion of the suffering, and that only within the narrow limits of the larger towns and their immediate surroundings. The work of relief is being earnestly

- The United States only came to understand the full extent of these camps and devastation of Cuba once the Spanish had been expelled and American troops were in control of Cuba.
- The devastation was so severe that General Order 502 was issued. This gave the food rations meant for the American military could only feed Cubans for two weeks.
- Rural towns in the eastern part of the island were the most devastated.

- The American military devised a system that prioritised the neediest first including the elderly, disabled, women, and children.
- Church groups, Relief Societies such as the Red Cross and Daughters of the Cuban Revolution, and business groups such as the New York Chamber of Commerce raised funds, collected foods, water, clothing, and medicines for the Cubans.