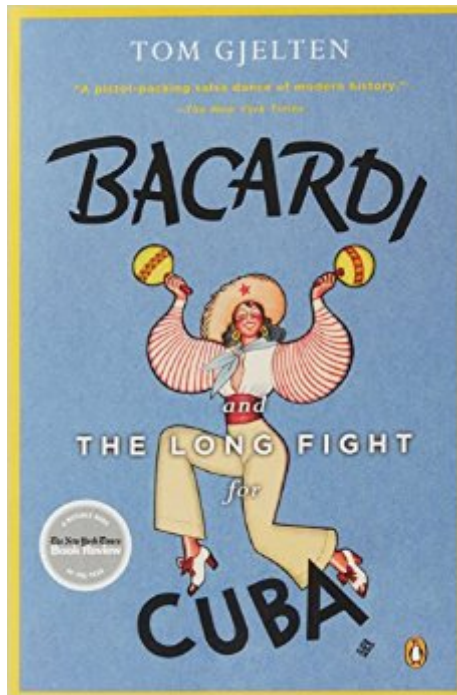


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Bacardi And The Long Fight For Cuba: The Biography Of A Cause



Synopsis

In this widely hailed book, NPR correspondent Tom Gjelten fuses the story of the Bacardi family and their famous rum business with Cuba's tumultuous experience over the last 150 years to produce a deeply entertaining historical narrative. The company Facundo Bacardi launched in Cuba in 1862 brought worldwide fame to the island, and in the decades that followed his Bacardi descendants participated in every aspect of Cuban life. With his intimate account of their struggles and adventures across five generations, Gjelten brings to life the larger story of Cuba's fight for freedom, its tortured relationship with America, the rise of Fidel Castro, and the violent division of the Cuban nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a terrific book. It tells the tale of 150 years of Cuban and Bacardi history without burdening you with more facts, personalities, and anecdotes than you need to understand the company. In addition to the story of the Bacardi family it is a fast overview of how and why Cuba got to where it is today. Like most good journalists, the author can compress a story yet give you the feeling that you know all the important stuff that needs to be known. The Bacardi family and company (it is still privately owned) certainly ranks as one of the most interesting and liberal I have ever come across reading about big businesses. They were not Johnnies come lately in the battle for Cuban freedom both from Spain and the native born dictators who followed after the American invaders left the island. They supported and financed the Castro revolution and then had to flee the country when he turned into a communist dictator. They then fought him from the Bay of Pigs to this day. At a time

when Cuban workers were exploited under Spain and then under Cuban dictators, Bacardi seems to have been an enlightened employer providing its workers with benefits and security far beyond others. When one remembers that the company prospered under a series of ruthless and corrupt dictators who turned Havana into a mafia controlled enclave, they seem all the more incredible that they could remain clean while they had so much mud around them. In fact, with the exception of the rare philanderer or less than bright family member, the Bacardi family over this 150 year time span seems extraordinary for their compassion, accomplishments, and sense of duty and honor. Perhaps too extraordinary. Reading through the book I had to marvel how so many people could be so good over so many years.

I took a fantastic cultural exchange trip to Cuba in November 2015. In preparation for the trip I read a variety of books about Cuba: biographies, memoirs, novels and histories. *Bacardi* by Tom Gjelten of NPR fame, was probably the single best introduction to the island's history and contemporary affairs. The author's central point is that the history of Cuba can be narrated around tales of rum; it has been a symbol of Cuban life from the days of sugar and slaves through the Castro era. And moreover, the survival and reorganization of the Bacardi rum company following its displacement from Cuba would amount to one of the more notable tales in business history. These theses are perhaps a bit oversold, but they make a highly readable narrative. Cuba is (or has been) synonymous with sugar. Molasses is a byproduct of sugar production and for many years it was dumped into Cuban rivers or shipped off to New England where it was turned into rum. The Bacardis, originally from Spain, were nothing if not proud Cubans – and they were, almost to a man, great men, at least according to the author. He lionizes the family, especially founding father Emilio Facundo Bacardi. After several failed commercial endeavors and nearly destitute, the patriarch experimented with and innovated a new, light version of the local rum product from his shop in Santiago de Cuba, the main port city of eastern Cuba. Slowly, literally over decades, beginning in 1862, he and his family established a recognizable brand and built a stable business operation. The Bacardi name – and their unusual logo, the bat – became synonymous with high quality Cuban rum.

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