



# **Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba: The Biography of a Cause**

*Tom Gjelten*

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**A unique history of Cuba, captured in the life and times of the famous rum dynasty**

The Bacardis of Cuba, builders of a rum distillery and a worldwide brand, came of age with their nation and helped define what it meant to be Cuban. Across five generations, the Bacardi family has held fast to its Cuban identity, even in exile from the country for whose freedom they once fought. Now National Public Radio correspondent Tom Gjelten tells the dramatic story of one family, its business, and its nation, a 150-year tale with the sweep and power of an epic.

The Bacardi clan--patriots and *bon vivants*, entrepreneurs and intellectuals--provided an example of business and civic leadership in its homeland for nearly a century. From the fight for Cuban independence from Spain in the 1860s to the rise of Fidel Castro and beyond, there is no chapter in Cuban history in which the Bacardis have not played a role. In chronicling the saga of this remarkable family and the company that bears its name, Tom Gjelten describes the intersection of business and power, family and politics, community and exile.

## Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba: The Biography of a Cause Details

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**Tom Gjelten**

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# **From Reader Review Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba: The Biography of a Cause for online ebook**

## **Nanette says**

Great history of Cuba. The book starts in the 1800s with the Spanish occupation of Cuba and goes through about 2008. The author does a great job weaving Cuban history into the Bacardi story and keeps it very interesting. I finished the book while laying on the beach in Havana, and felt like it gave me a very good, though basic, understanding of Cuba. Before reading the book I had watched a documentary about Castro that led me to believe that he wasn't all that bad of a guy. Reading this book definitely changed that perception. I'd say this is a must-read if you are planning to visit Cuba. I'd also recommend this to anyone who wants a deeper look at the country.

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## **Chris says**

Exhaustively reported. One-third detailed history of the Bacardi family in Cuba, one-third thrilling tale of revolution and exile, one-third excruciating minutiae about international patent law. What I learned: All dictators are evil. All politics are corrupt. Buy rum from an independent distillery.

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## **Simen Karset says**

If you are planning a trip to Cuba, this should be an interesting read. If you're a fan of cocktails, Cuban culture and Cuban history this book covers it all from around 1860 to 2007.

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## **River says**

This book is about the history of the Bacardi Company, and its rich history alongside Cuba. The book shows the reader every choice the company has made, from its founder, to its revision in America. The history goes back to 1860s, then to the turn of the century. I personally love the rich details of Cuba's past, and how the company has grown alongside it. I would say it tells all, without being unnecessarily long.

The book starts with the first generation of the "true" Bacardi family. It tells the story of how this one rum company rose above others. They changed the way rum was made, and how important marketing is. With the story of how the family ran its business, it also details the different places Cuba found itself in. From the Cuban War of Independence to Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuban businesses. You read about how the story shifts into each event of Cuba's history and how the Bacardi's adapted to the changes. Not only is this a history book, it makes learning about Cuba interesting. Seeing how the people reacted to these life changing events isn't boring and the book doesn't pause for too long on any point.

In the end I think this book accomplished a lot for someone wanted a overview of Cuba and the Bacardi Company. I personally loved the way this book was written, and I think anyone who is planning a visit to Cuba should give this a read. I would say any student or adult wanting to learn would enjoy this book.

Overall these kinds of books are a must read for students, and more should be available to the public.

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### **Zahreen says**

well-written history of Cuba

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### **David says**

I bought 5 books for my trip to Cuba and ended up reading parts and skimming most.

This was the best non-fiction history, but it dig bog down a bit on the deep details of the Bacardi family. The best part for me were the years up to the revolution, the revolution and the initial period after the revolution triumphed and the beginnings of the anti-Castro movement in exile.

Our tour guide guide was superb for the week in Cuba, and while I had feared that she (as an employee of the state) would be essentially a propaganda agent, I did not get this impression at all. Very balanced and straightforward. Anyway, as it relates here, she had been given this book (it would be censored in Cuba) by another tourist, and vouched that she thought it was a good and fair history herself, as a Cuban educated entirely in Cuba, and working for the state. I thought that was a good recommendation.

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### **Robert says**

3.5 stars. Fascinating history of the struggle for Cuban independence told through the lives of the Bacardi family. The pacing of the storytelling is slow but it is still an enjoyable read. One criticism is that I felt the author was so enamored with the family that he quickly shrugs off some of their failings.

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### **Michael says**

3.5

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### **Stephen Selbst says**

Tom Gjelten tells the intertwined story of Bacardi and Cuba. Part family business memoir, part Cuban history, this book will be welcomed by any student of Cuban history. The book weakens after Cuba seizes the Bacardi factory; the Bacardi family, burned by the what they perceived as their betrayal by Castro, becomes part of the irredentist anti-Castro exile community. That story has been told elsewhere, and this book adds little that is new. And the interfamily squabbles about the direction of a successful family firm as it expands in the post-Cuba era are simply less interesting than the story of how the Bacardi family originally built the company and grew in the early days of the Cuban Republic. A worthwhile read, but the last quarter of the book could have been pruned with little loss of impact.

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**Peter says**

Awesome book, recommend it to anyone who likes drinking and hates commies.

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**Diogo Machado says**

I started this book in my trip to Cuba and it revealed a very interesting read. The Bacardi's company, founded in mid 19th century is used as a conducting wire through the history of Cuba, from the Spanish colonial liberation until the Fidel Castro regime.

The book is very good picturing the country struggles in different periods, from the eyes of the Bacardi's family members that had several important roles in Cuba history.

If you are planning a trip to Cuba, this is an interesting read. It gives a glimpse of the Cuban culture and history that will enrich your travel experience.

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**Vincent says**

An interesting presentation of a family business and the evolution of Cuba in the process. Gjeften presents this well and tunes it into the various Cuban governments - originally I thought it might have been a commission vanity book for the family but I found that in the end I believe it was a reasonably accurate portrayal of people and power and freedom over several generations. Sadly in the end the achilles heel of American politics was exposed by the recounting of efforts to buy members of Congress.

A worthy read - I started it on Kindle for my trip to Cuba - should have finished it first if I could have.

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**Sarahmarsh85 . says**

Fascinating but needed sharper editing,too long!

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**Matthew says**

I LOVED this book. It is a great opportunity to learn more about the history of Cuba, thru the lens of one family and their business. All elements of the story are interesting.

Family: From Facundo Barcardi emigrating from Spain to Cuba up until the grandchildren of those in exile, there is a amazing and admirable cast of characters. one of my favorite anecdotes is Emilio Barcardi, the Founder's oldest son, once said that his favorite phrase in American English was "Go ahead" because in no other language did it have the directness and imply the same meaning. However, Pepin Bosch is probably my favorite.

Political: The Barcardi family was surprisingly progressive and pursued those policies early providing employees with wages and benefits that many American workers at the time would have envied. Always civic minded and passionate about lifting Cuba up, they nonetheless couldn't be progressive enough to satisfy murderous commies.

Business: Shrewd, inventive, forward thinking, and so disciplined that unlike many wholly owned family businesses, has managed to go through 4 generations without falling apart.

I strongly recommend this book.

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### **Sally says**

This book tried to read like a text book but was far to interesting to skip parts or put down for long. It packed a lot of information into some fascinating reading. Well done!

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### **Susan Jenna says**

Acclaimed NPR reporter Tom Gjelten did not set out to write about the Bacardi rum company. Instead, he intended to write about Cuba's tumultuous history. But, after spending seven months on the island, he found that Cuba's history was inextricably intertwined with Bacardi's.

Founded by Facundo Bacardi in the 1860s (a native Spaniard), Bacardi and his son, Facundo, Jr., refined the distilling process to create a smooth drink—unlike the fire water widely available. They were able to command a premium price and counted the Spanish court among their customers.

But it was Facundo's son, Emilio, who ignited the family and company's political involvement. You see, at the time, Cuba was a Spanish colony—just as the United States had been 100 years earlier—under repressive government and church rule. Racism was rampant, natives were enslaved, the government was corrupt...

Emilio was torn between serving the company (he was a gifted marketer) and toppling the monarchy, until he seized upon a brilliant scheme: use the company as a front for revolutionary activity! Hide rifles in rum crates, fund the rebel forces with company profits, send coded messages with deliveries.

After several long, agonizing decades—during which Emilio was imprisoned several times—Cuba was finally free. But, ironically, only because the Americans liberated it during the Spanish-American War. Sadly, the liberators quickly became the occupying force.

It gets crazier... from the Prohibition Era, during which mobsters held court in Havana... to the faux "populism" of Fidel Castro (whom Bacardi president Pepin Bosch tried to have assassinated from exile in Miami)... this book captures it all!

It's an amazing untold story for history buffs and fans of political intrigue.

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## David says

When I saw the Edificio Bacardi in Havana in 2015, I had no idea the family's Cuban history. I do now. A family owned company, committed as long as it could to Cuba as an independent and free country, managed to navigate to an international spirits powerhouse.

The book is a little long in parts, but I thoroughly enjoyed it.

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## John Hood says

<http://miamisunpost.com/091808bound.htm>

Bound September 18, 08

Rum Punch

Tom Gjelten Chronicles La Familia Bacardi

By John Hood

Castro is nothing, compared to Bacardi. Okay, so the former had a little Revolution, and in some form or another has been holding on to dear power for nearly 50 years. But outside of Miami and Havana, Fidel's surname is seldom spoken.

Not so Bacardi, which gets said just about every time anyone, anywhere orders a Cuba Libre. And if it doesn't get said, it still gets served, nine times out of 10. Why? Because when you think rum, you think Bacardi.

Of course, one doesn't get to be the most famous maker of any kind of spirit without hard work, high anxiety, healthy appetites and subterfuge — and la familia Bacardi is no exception. Which makes Tom Gjelten's recently released Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba: The Biography of a Cause (Viking Penguin \$27.95) one helluva family saga.

Gjelten, the long-time NPR correspondent whose work has earned him Polk, Kennedy and Overseas Press Club awards, here traces a dynasty as bold as it is unbound. It's a colorful saga, to be sure, told with uncommon grace, and it gets bolstered by a wide selection of photographs previously unpublished outside of Cuba.

Earlier this week, Gjelten was feted at both Bacardi headquarters and the Freedom Tower, in an event co-hosted by Friends of WLRN and the Florida Center for the Literary Arts. Before that, I had the pleasure of meeting the man by the Biltmore Hotel pool and throwing him a few Qs. Here are some of the As he threw back.

Where did you get the idea for this book?

Actually, the idea came from my editor. You know, when your publisher comes up with an idea, it's always

good to pay close attention. The way it started was, I had done a book on Bosnia before [Sarajevo Daily:], and after I moved back here [from Europe:] I got really interested in Cuba. Naturally, having covered the collapse of Communism, I came back thinking — like a lot of people — that Cuba was next.

I started going down to Cuba in 1994 and became, really, sort of obsessed with it. It's a very mysterious place, very hard to understand and complicated, and I told my editor [Wendy Wolf:] I wanted to write about it.

But we spent a couple years trying to figure out how I could get at it in a fresh way.

Then I did a story on the battle between Bacardi and Pernod Ricard over Havana Club rum and she said, "Bacardi. That's it!" This was in 1999.

It was another four years before I took time off and did any serious research. I was just kind of collecting string all that time. Actually in 2001 I did two, back-to-back 11-minute pieces for NPR on the battle over Cuban rum, and that's when I made my initial contacts in Cuba, and my initial contacts with the Bacardi family. But it wasn't until 2003 that I took time off to really get seriously involved.

But you didn't spend five straight years writing this book, did you?

No, I would say all together I probably took two and a half. There's a lot of research involved, and I underestimated how much work it was gonna be. My Bosnia book basically took about eight months, and I thought, how hard can my second book be?

In Bosnia, though, once you've got your boots on the ground, the story writes itself, no?

Right, and this is a history book, covering six generations. In the back of my mind, I sort of had One Hundred Years of Solitude, this family epic, and that's how I had to approach it. In a book like this, it's almost as if the generations themselves become characters; each one has its own personality, reflecting their own time and their own era.

Do you think the Bacardis are poised to go back in, once Castro's out?

Yes. One of the reasons I like them — as a story — is you can talk about Cuba's past by talking about Bacardi. You can talk about the rise of Castro, the counterrevolution, the exile community, and you can also talk about the future. My point is that one of the few industries in Cuba that has some kind of potential is the rum industry, and Bacardi is going to be a part of it.

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## **Maria says**

This non fiction book was thoroughly researched and reads like fiction. As a first generation American born of Cuban parents and a long time lover of Bacardi rum, it was really cool to get a detailed glimpse into the



historical events that led to Castro's revolution, and to get a ground level view of what drove my parents to flee their homeland. I never realized that the Bacardi family had such strong ties to multiple revolutions in Cuba--turning against the last one after it took a dark turn--and I will forever have a greater appreciation for the spirit.

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## **Woody says**

Cuban history as seen through the lens of the Bacardi Rum Company - an original Cuban enterprise. This is a fascinating perspective that involves many key players from Cuba, the US, Europe and the Soviet Union.

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