

exiles and Washington, the book is difficult to take seriously as adding to our understanding or knowledge.

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**Antonio Rafael de la Cova. *Cuban Confederate Colonel: The Life of Ambrosio José Gonzales*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. 537 pp.**

Confederate Colonel Ambrosio José Gonzales was the highest ranking Cuban-born officer on either side in the American Civil War. Despite consistently outstanding service, he was denied promotion to brigadier general six times by President Jefferson Davis. Born in Matanzas in 1818 to a prominent family of educators and landowners, Gonzales was schooled in New York and joined Venezuelan-born filibuster Narciso López as his adjutant general in the ill-fated 1850 expedition to the United States. Wounded at Cárdenas, Gonzales retreated with López and the surviving expeditionaries to Florida. Gonzales was recuperating in Georgia when López sailed without him on his last, fatal expedition to Cuba in 1851. Handsome, cultured, affable, and an expert marksman, “General Gonzales” was well received in Southern society; he married the teenaged daughter of a wealthy South Carolina family in 1856 and settled on a plantation near Charleston. A naturalized U.S. citizen since 1849, Gonzales sided with South Carolina when his adopted state seceded from the union in 1860.

Antonio Rafael de la Cova has written an excellent book. *Cuban Confederate Colonel: The Life of Ambrosio José Gonzales* is the portrait of the man in his era, rendered in rich, pointillist detail. Dazzling contrasts and contradictions define the protagonist and his grotesquely mutating environment. An aspiring liberator, Gonzales considered slavery an economic necessity for both Cuba and the southern United States. He and his South Carolina compatriots shamelessly employed the rhetoric of freedom to expand the territory of slavery in the United States, designated “liberty’s country” by General Lafayette. The aged doyen of the liberal international, on his last visit to South Carolina in the 1820s, could not persuade the descendants of his revolutionary comrades to abandon their unseemly attachment to slavery. In the 1830s the abolitionist Grimké sisters and John C. Frémont left Charleston for good. The last audible voice for reason in the state fell silent when Joel R. Poinsett died in 1851. About that time, Ambrosio José Gonzales appeared on the scene. “Poor South Carolina,” an observer lamented: “too small for a republic, too big for an insane asylum.”

For virtually the entire Civil War, Gonzales was chief of artillery for the

Confederate department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida under General P.G.T. Beauregard and his successors. Each of his commanders recommended him for the rank of brigadier general, and Gonzales futilely lobbied President Davis for the promotion. Davis was put off by Gonzales's self-promotion and resented what he considered the Cuban's misrepresentation of past favors he claimed to have done for the future Confederate president. But Gonzales's military accomplishments were real. An innovative, self-taught artilleryman, he employed his guns with unprecedented flexibility for maximum effect in the defense of Charleston, the cradle of secession and, after the fall of New Orleans in 1862, the Confederacy's essential link to the outside world. Gonzales was enormously popular with the besieged Charlestonians (who insisted on addressing him as "General") and was duly appreciated by the departmental commanders, though his relations with Beauregard's chief of staff, Brigadier General Thomas Jordan, were tense. Jordan was a Virginian and West Point graduate whose concepts of military administration clashed with the free-wheeling attitude of the Cuban artillery chief. But they worked together well enough to save Charleston for the Confederacy until the last days of the war.

After the war Gonzales returned to Matanzas with his wife and five children, hoping to rebuild his fortune among his Cuban relatives. In March 1868, Jefferson Davis visited him in Matanzas and the two were reconciled. Gonzales's other Confederate nemesis, Thomas Jordan, appeared in Oriente province as a major general of the Cuban Liberation Army in the Ten Years War that began in October 1868. Although Gonzales had no contact with Jordan and disavowed the new independence movement, Spanish authorities were suspicious and made life hard for him in Matanzas. Then his beloved wife, Hattie, died of yellow fever, and the destitute Gonzales returned to the United States and farmed out their children to various relatives. A vindictive sister-in-law waged a cruel campaign to alienate the children from their father, who spent the rest of his life in precarious financial circumstances, struggling to regain the affection of his progeny. Ultimately, he succeeded. On his death in New York in 1893, he was eulogized in *The State*, the influential South Carolina newspaper founded by his two oldest sons, and hailed by both Jefferson Davis and José Martí as a champion of liberty.