

*Cuban Confederate Colonel: The Life of Ambrosio José Gonzales.* By Antonio Rafael de la Cova. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. xxviii, 540 pp. List of illustrations, list of maps, preface, introduction, abbreviations, epilogue, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$59.95 cloth.)

Until fairly recently historians of the antebellum and Confederate South have paid scant attention to the significant contributions made by residents of Hispanic origin. However, in recent years, scholars have begun looking into this subject, resulting in a steadily growing body of literature. Antonio Rafael de la Cova's new biography of Cuban expatriate Ambrosio José Gonzales (1818-1893) is a welcome addition to this expanding field.

Born into a substantial Cuban family and educated as a lawyer, young Gonzales attended school in the United States and at one point was a classmate of future general P.G.T. Beauregard. As a consequence of his involvement with Cuban revolutionary groups, Gonzales moved to the United States and became an active Freemason and a dedicated champion of Cuban independence from Spain. By 1848, he was a close lieutenant of filibuster Narciso Lopez and participated in the ill-fated 1850 Cardenas military expedition in which Gonzales suffered a wound and became the first to shed blood for the cause of Cuba Libre. Barely escaping a sentence in an American prison for violating the Neutrality Act for his filibustering activities, Gonzales resigned himself to advocate Cuban liberty and possibly annexation with his pen and not a sword.

The personable Gonzales made many friends in leadership positions in the South by the early 1850s and was especially welcome in South Carolina. He used all these connections in vain attempts to secure a diplomatic posting in either the Pierce or Buchanan administrations. Despite strong endorsements and energetic lobbying on Gonzales's part, he never received such an appointment. His reputation as an ardent Cuban partisan did little to help his cause, and the author does not consider whether his ethnic background worked against him. In the end, he solved his employment problems by marrying into a prominent South Carolina planter family, the Elliots.

While never a slaveholder, Gonzales supported the institution in both his native and adopted homelands. Soon after the firing on Fort Sumter, he offered his services to the new Confederacy, first as a volunteer aide to his old school chum Beauregard, and then as an

artillery officer. In time he became the chief of artillery in the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. For the duration, he performed yeoman service in the defense of the Charleston area as well as on the battlefield in the 1864 clash at Honey Hill. Unfortunately, Gonzales never rose above the rank of colonel and had the dubious distinction of being passed over six times for promotion to brigadier general. Author de la Cova speculates that an old feud with President Jefferson Davis, as well as a general prejudice in Richmond against any officer serving under Beauregard, stymied his efforts to attain the rank his duties called for.

After Appomattox, Gonzales's life entered a new phase that was both poignant and quite sad at times. Attempts at planting and operating a retail business in Charleston failed disastrously. With an almost Micawber-like optimism he pressed on with other schemes, including yet another abortive campaign to secure a federal position in the 1880s. Next came a bitter family dispute that alienated him from his children and sent him to paid spiritualists claiming to have messages from his beloved deceased wife. However the aged Gonzales did enjoy the praise from a new generation of Cuban freedom fighters like José Martí before his death and burial in an unmarked grave in 1893.

Students of Florida history will not doubt be interested in Gonzales's activities in the state during his long career. He was a frequent visitor to Key West and maintained a long friendship with political leader and fellow Freemason Stephen R. Mallory. Gonzales could also call Henry Titus and David Levy Yulee associates. He additionally spent time in Quincy as a part of his travels, and for a time contemplated relocating to the peninsula in search of a fresh economic start. Perhaps Gonzales might have found stability in being a part of Florida's growing postbellum Cuban community.

*Cuban Confederate Colonel* is much more of a biography than its title implies. It offers interesting new insights on the Cuban filibuster movement. Gonzales's service to the Confederate States is also noteworthy for understanding the siege of Charleston and the ever-contentious politics of the Confederate high command. And lastly it is a recommended tale of a proud man struggling against hard times to make a life for himself and his family while never surrendering to despair.