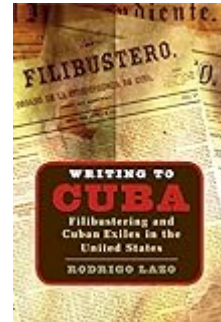


Rodrigo Lazo. *Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 264 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2930-1; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5594-2.



Reviewed by Antonio Rafael de la Cova (Indiana University–Bloomington)

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Cuban Filibusters: Continued Misunderstandings and Politically Sensitivity

During the first half of the nineteenth century, hundreds of Cuban political exiles arrived in the United States in three waves: 1823, 1838, and 1848. They were fleeing Spanish colonial oppression that denied them their basic human rights. Some of them got involved in the two filibuster military expeditions led by Narciso Lopez that invaded Cuba in 1850 and 1851. They were following the Texas model of independence and annexation by first acquiring funds, weapons, and volunteers in the United States for their endeavor. The expatriates created their own Spanish-language and bilingual revolutionary newspapers. They received favorable publicity in the Democratic press, while the Whig press denounced the filibusters as outlaws and hirelings of slavery expansionists.

Writing to Cuba is an extension of Lazo's 1998 American literature dissertation "Filibustering an Empire: Transamerican Writing and U.S. Expansionism," in the English Department of the University of Maryland at College Park. Consequently, the writer focuses on the importance of transnational publications in the nineteenth-century United States. He examines a dozen

Cuban exile publications and a Spanish royalist newspaper. Eleven were published in New York, one in New Orleans, and another in Havana, during 1848-1866. Some newspapers appeared for years, while others disappeared after a dozen issues or less. Many articles were published without bylines to avoid Spanish government reprisals. The author relied on incomplete collections located in the Jose Marti National Library in Havana and in scattered repositories in the United States. He analyzes each publication's transnational content relating to nineteenth-century politics. Lazo also describes the "poetry of armed combat" published in these periodicals and gives his own interpretation of their metaphors and meanings.

A substantial problem with this work is its classification as a history book, which is not the author's main field of expertise. There are no primary sources cited other than the thirteen newspapers the book is largely based on. Secondary sources are also problematic. Lazo greatly relies on Tom Chaffin's *Fatal Glory: Narciso Lopez and the First Clandestine U.S. War Against Cuba* (1996), cited fifteen times, for his background on filibuster events. This book has been criticized in reviews

for its poor research, misspellings, inaccuracies, and lack of Spanish-language comprehension. Lazo repeats Chaffin's error that "Investors from the United States in 1828 founded Cardenas" (p. 8), instead of the Count of Villanueva and Andres Jose de la Portilla. Lazo also cites Chaffin when stating that Lopez's last expedition "included forty-nine Cubans" (p. 29), unaware that this group contained some Venezuelans and more than half of the others were Spaniards who deserted from the Cardenas Company of the Leon Regiment and joined Lopez in Cuba in 1850.

As a result of relying on weak sources, Lazo provides cursory biographical data on most of the leading exile literary figures. He writes (page 203, n. 76): "Scholars have estimated that [Pedro Angel] Castellon died in exile in 1856, but they have been unable to determine exactly where, how, or when. His tomb has not been found." A perusal of newspapers from New Orleans, where Castellon last resided, reveals that he died there on June 24, 1856, and was interred in a local cemetery. Other important exile writers neglected include Jose Agustin Quintero and Francisco Javier de la Cruz. Quintero (1829-1885), whose biography *Jose Agustin Quintero: un enigma historico en el exilio cubano del ochocientos* was published by Jorge Marban in 2001, was a noted poet, attorney, filibuster conspirator, Confederate diplomat, and editor of the New Orleans *Picayune*. Lazo omits mentioning Quintero's renowned poem "The Banquet of the Exiled" or his English-language manuscript *Lyric Poetry in Cuba*, which is in the Boston Public Library. De la Cruz (1804-1894) was a historian, journalist, poet, and educator who landed with the Lopez expedition in Cardenas in 1850. Lazo also overlooked *La Verdad* collaborators Pedro de Agüero Sanchez, and Tomas M. Rosis, a Savannah cigar maker and Georgia Militia private, whose poetry appeared in the newspaper on August 12, 1850, and whose papers are in the Duke University Library.

Cirilo Villaverde, the main exile figure in this work, is depicted as "a man of action" and "revolutionary fighter" (pp. 100, 103, 107), emphasizing "his participation in filibustering expeditions" (p. 170). The historical record shows that Villaverde, who was General Lopez's personal secretary, refused to go on both filibuster expeditions that landed in Cuba, failed to join more than fifty other Cuban exiles who fought on opposite sides of the American Civil War, and did not take up arms during the Cuban Ten Years' War of Independence (1868-1878).

While the preface states that "This book focuses on the growth of a community in which the publication of

newspapers became an anchor for writers in exile," the author does not substantiate the accurate size or heterogeneity of the Cuban community in the United States. He describes the expatriates as "arriving in large numbers" (p. 10), and their enclaves were "rapidly growing" (p. 22), "growing" (p. 31), and "significant" in New Orleans (p. 42). He then cites an erroneous secondary source to indicate that "By 1853, the Cuban population in the United States probably numbered several hundred" (p. 66). An analysis of the 1850 U.S. Federal census indicates that there were 1,061 persons of Cuban birth in the nation. A decade later, the number had doubled to 2,157, and by 1870 there were 6,710 Cubans in the United States.

Lazo provides little information about the newspapers that he cites. There is no estimate of how many issues were printed or the number that were shipped abroad. For example, he briefly describes *El Espejo* newspaper as "a commercial sheet filled with advertisements for U.S.-made export products" that "circulated in Latin America" and was "owned and edited" by Narciso Villaverde in 1882 (p. 169). In contrast, numerous R. G. Dun & Company credit reports (Jan. 1874-Oct. 1897) indicate that *El Espejo* was founded in 1873 by W. H. Wilson and Andres Cassard at 67 William Street, New York City. It was published on the 20th of each month and had "a circulation of at least 10,000 ... through the West Indies, Mexico, Central & South America, & Spain." It was "originally started by and in the interest of 9 South American Houses" and the subscription was three dollars annually "in gold payable in advance." In 1879, William J. Cassard was the sole proprietor after he "courted the daughter of a retired merchant & married her & it is understood her relatives furnished some means to carry on the business." When Narciso Villaverde acquired the newspaper in 1881, it had a "moderate" number of subscribers and by 1883 it was "making no money." The enterprise folded in 1897 after Cuban A. R. Govin won a judicial settlement against it for \$1,726.

This book also contains some redundancy missed by the editors. For example, the sentence "In 1854, Emilia Casanova moved with her family from Cuba to Philadelphia, where she met Cirilo Villaverde. The following year the two were married and settled in the New York area," appears on page 119 and again on page 131.

Lazo concludes his work by refusing to compare nineteenth-century Cuban exile publications with those printed during the last five decades in the United States because the "debates over annexation, slavery, and filibustering, [are] issues that are not relevant to the post-

1959 period.” The dozen publications that he analyzed all denounced totalitarianism, despotism, censorship, oppression of basic freedoms, forced exile, political imprisonment and execution, and championed liberty and democratic institutions. These are the same themes addressed since 1959 in hundreds of Cuban exile publications that are stored in the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami and the ones that are still being published today. Lazo acknowledges that in 1852 Cuban exiles “rejoiced at the possibility that the presidential administration would provide military backup for a filibustering attack on the island” (p. 34). He omitted men-

tion that these have been the same aspirations of most Cuban exiles after President John Kennedy sponsored the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion. Lazo indicated that in the nineteenth century “the liberation of Cuba was inextricable from the return of exiles who were developing a different conception of the government that would be established on the island” (p. 49) but does not see a correlation with present-day dissidents. Such comparisons would certainly annoy the Cuban government official who the author thanks in the preface for access to the ideologically protected National Library in Havana.

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