

OUR AMERICAN HISTORY

LA HISTORIA DE NUESTRA AMÉRICA



Introduction

The contribution of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans in assisting the North American colonists to win the American Revolutionary War is an important and relatively unknown history. King Carlos III of Spain and his ministers decided to finance the American Revolution with the French in 1776. The Spanish and Hispanic Americans continued to assist the colonists throughout the Revolutionary War, directly by providing loans and military supplies and indirectly by enabling international trade in which the rebels could earn the hard currency in silver and gold that they needed to purchase weapons and supplies and to pay the soldiers of the Continental Army.

When the Spanish declared war on the British in 1779, they opened another theater of the war that forced the British to divert soldiers, supplies, naval power, and finances from fighting the North American colonists to fighting the Spanish. The Spanish and Hispanic Americans fought against the British from Pensacola, Florida to San Carlos, Nicaragua.

Guiding Questions

- What were the differences in the economies of North and South America in the 18th century versus the 21st century?
- Why was the assistance of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans important to the North American colonists in winning the American Revolutionary War?
- How do we, as a society, determine a truthful and accurate view of history?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the contribution of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans to the American Revolutionary War.
- Understand the challenges that the North Americans faced when fighting the American Revolutionary War
- Discuss the meaning of “history” and how our perceptions of past events are formulated.

Grades 7 –12

Subject Areas

History and Social Studies

Time Required

1 or 2 class sessions

National History Standards 7 - 12

Historical Thinking Standards

- Standard 1: Chronological Thinking
- Standard 2: Historical Comprehension
- Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities
- Standard 5: Historical Issues Analysis and Decision-Making

Background Information for the Teacher

North and South American Economies during the American Revolutionary War

During the 18th century, the economies of North and South America were almost the reverse of the 21st century. Mexico City then had a population of 150,000, five times as large as Philadelphia, the most populous city in British North America, and ten times the size of Boston. The silver mines of Mexico and Bolivia and gold mines in upper Peru were then the richest in the world, and formed the base of the wealth exported to the Spanish Empire. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, this indigenous population had recovered somewhat from the devastation of the Spanish invasion, and the total population in the Caribbean and South American Spanish empire was estimated at 20 to 22 million, 13 million of which were Indian.

By the late 18th century, Havana had glowed as the “Key to the New World” for over 250 years. The city with its protected port was the shipping hub for the gold, silver, and wealth of the Spanish empire. Havana in the 1780s was a prosperous and elegant city, and a critical trading partner with the beleaguered colonies. The Spanish silver dollar was widely circulated in North America as a sound alternative to the increasingly hyper-inflated American Continental paper currency.

The North American colonies were, by contrast, colonies that exported their natural resources to purchase manufactured goods. The colonies were deliberately kept in economic backwardness by policies and legislation dictated by London. The [Currency Act of 1764](#) prohibited the colonies from minting coins or printing currency. Gold deposits were not discovered until well after the Revolutionary War. Without local currency, the colonies usually relied on Spanish specie, called pieces of eight, pesos, or “Mexicans,” since so much of the late 18th century Spanish mineral wealth was from the well-developed mining operations in Mexico. Congress authorized the first [Continental currency](#), designated as two million in Spanish milled dollars, in June of 1775. The Continental currency quickly began to lose value and to inflate, and by the 1779, the currency was at 1/25th of its value.

Over 95% of the colonists worked in agriculture, compared to less than 2% of us today. While agriculture and the proto-industrial production in the rural economies enabled a high standard of living for the 18th century, this economic structure could not support sustained warfare. For example, the [Navigation Acts of 1750](#) limited iron production in the colonies to pig iron. Pig iron is processed raw iron, with a very high carbon content that makes it brittle and useful only in limited applications, lacking the gleaming tensile strength required for fatally efficient bayonets or to withstand explosive cannon fire. Rifles were handcrafted throughout the colonies, particularly in Pennsylvania, but not in sufficient quantities for an Army.

Gunpowder was in short supply throughout the war. Domestic production began quickly, but the colonies were also dependent on imported commodities of sulfur and saltpeter. While historians bicker as to the percentage of domestic production versus imports, all agree that the colonists and Continental Army were desperate for gunpowder throughout the entire Revolutionary War, and that almost all of the

gunpowder or its critical components were imported. Historians estimate that 80% to 90% of all the powder available to supply the Revolution during the first two and a half years was imported.

Uniforms, clothing, shoes, tents, and blankets were also in short supply, contributing to the terrible toll of casualties of the Continental Army: eight times the number of men died of non-combat causes than were killed in the fighting. The death toll was exacerbated by the nightmarish smallpox epidemic that raged during the War, but the shortages of warm clothing, decent food, and adequate shelter were contributing factors. In 1776 General George Washington wrote that our Army would face the powerful British on the battlefield “without any money in our treasury, powder in our magazines, arms in our stores...and by and by, when we shall be called upon to take the field, shall not have a tent to lie in.”

By 1781, the country was wearying of the long rebellion. The currency collapsed in May 1781 and the few supplies that there were could not be shipped without hard currency payments. The sick were without medicine and food, and the troops were without clothing and shoes. The Continental Army troops, underpaid, underfed, and undersupplied throughout the War, began serious mutinies over the lack of pay and supplies.

A desperate George Washington [wrote in April 1781](#) to one of his young staff officers sent on another fund-raising mission, “but why need I run into the detail, when it may be declared in a word, that we are at the end of our tether [rope], and that now or never our deliverance must come.”

Washington’s desperate letter underscores the importance of the provisions from the Spanish and Hispanic Americans. Supplies of gunpowder, muskets, bayonets, cannons, mortars, cannon balls, bullets, clothing, uniforms, shoes, tents, blankets, ships rigging and sails were financed by the Spanish and smuggled to the Continental Army from [Spain](#), [Mexico](#), and [Cuba](#). The colonies received favorable trade status in Havana early in the war, allowing them to sell commodities such as flour in exchange for desperately needed silver. During that desperate year, it was also the Spanish and Cubans who funded the [Battle of Yorktown](#), delivering an emergency collection of silver and gold from Havana, Cuba with the French fleet sailing from the Caribbean to Virginia.

The Spanish Empire

Spain’s early support for the American Revolutionary War was marked by caution and secrecy as the Spanish sought to ready themselves to once again fight their familiar enemy, the British. The Spanish position was summarized by the former Spanish Prime Minister and then Ambassador to the French Court, [Pablo-Jerónimo de Grimaldi y Pallavicini](#). In early 1777, Arthur Lee, one of the Continental Congress’ early agents in Europe, tried to persuade the Spanish to declare an open alliance between Spain and the fledgling United States. Grimaldi declined, replying, “You have considered your own situation, and not ours. The moment is not yet come for us. The war with Portugal — France being unprepared, and our treasure ships from South America not being arrived — makes it improper for us to declare immediately.” Meanwhile, Grimaldi reassured

Lee, stores of clothing and gunpowder were deposited at New Orleans and Havana for the Americans, and further shipments of blankets were being collected at Bilbao.

Determining the best timing for a war with the British was a lesson that the Spanish had bitterly learned earlier in the 18th century during the French and Indian War (1754-1763) as it was called in North America or the Seven Year's War (1756-1763) as it was termed in Europe. [King Carlos III](#), who ruled Spain from 1759 to 1788 and during the years of the American Revolution, was an uncle to the French King Louis XVI who also supported the rebels. Carlos III and Louis XVI were further united by a renewal of the third Bourbon Family Compact in 1762, in which they declared that the enemy of one of the Crowns would be the enemy of both – in other words, the British enemy, who were furious over the agreement.

King Carlos III authorized the declaration of war against the British to support the French in 1762. This entry into the Seven Years War was disastrous for the Spanish. Spain's prized possessions from Havana, Cuba to Manila, Philippines were attacked and seized by the British. The financial losses and territorial losses were staggering. In the peace treaty of 1762, signed by Grimaldi, Spain lost its possessions in Florida, which it had settled in the 16th century. The French gave New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to the Spanish as compensation.

In the late 1770s, when the harsh discussions of war once more echoed through the elegant marble palaces of Madrid, the Spanish remembered all too clearly the devastating losses of power, wealth and territories from their last conflict with the British. Spain had much to lose and much to protect in the dangerous period of empire building and global conflict that loomed again before them. This time, they determined that they would be wholly prepared for war on all fronts of their far-flung empire.

The King and his officials understood the importance of the North American rebellion to their own territories and to their ambitions to undermine the British. The Spanish Secretary of State, José Moñino y Redondo, the [Conde of Floridablanca](#), wrote in March of 1777, “the fate of the colonies interests us very much, and we shall do for them everything that circumstances permit....”

By June 1779, the Spanish were ready for war, and began military operations against the British in the Americas, from Pensacola, Florida, to San Carlos, Nicaragua. These battles diverted the British Army and Naval from fighting against the colonists, to the relief of the Continental Army, which was losing in the southern United States.

Even in the sunset of their empire, the Spanish still had the financial power, productive capacity, armed forces, naval fleet, and economic strength to influence the outcome of the North American conflict towards victory or defeat. The decisions made and assistance given helped to win the American Revolutionary War.

Mexico

During the years of the American Revolutionary War in the 1770s, silver from the mines in Mexico reached the most rapid increases in over a century of production. Through this quadrupling of production Mexico then accounted for 67% of all American output of silver. [Guanajuato](#), the leading center, equaled the production of the entire viceroyalty of either Peru or La Plata. The silver coins, known as pieces of eight, pesos or “Mexicans” were used throughout the North American colonies. Even the British Army in North America paid their troops in silver pesos. In November 1776, several months after the Declaration of Independence, Congress adopted the silver peso as its standard of currency.

The explosion in silver production during those years resulted from improvements in fiscal incentives, government policies for commodity prices, the hard work of the silver miners, and the management skills of the ‘silver kings’. Government policies reduced prices for the commodities which were required to produce silver, including mercury and gunpowder. The Mexican labor force was increasing during this period, and the diverse Mexican silver miners were a free, well-paid and highly mobile labor force. In most camps, these miners earned a share of the silver ore in addition to their daily wage.

The ‘silver kings’ collaborated with the merchant capitalists to back ventures that often required years and sometimes decades of investment before yielding profit. The scale of the Mexican enterprises rivaled enterprises across Europe.

Cuba

By the mid-18th century, Havana had been established for almost 250 years and was home to more than 80,000 people. The walled city was built to specific architectural rules as were all of the early cities of Spanish America, with carved gates that enclosed whitewashed houses with red tiled roofs, stately homes with heavy wooden doors and large courtyards, the central Plaza de Armas, a Franciscan monastery, Dominican university and Jesuit college.

Havana was known as the ‘Key to the New World’, and during the American Revolutionary War, it was the center of operations to aid the North Americans, either directly through providing gunpowder and other military supplies, or indirectly by providing a trading port in which the colonists could sell commodities such as flour to earn desperately needed silver pesos.

[Early in 1776](#), the Spanish in Havana began to send observers to the colonies, to meet with General George Washington and members of Congress. One agent, Juan De Miralles, succeeded in evading the British naval blockade and established his residence in Philadelphia during the War. Miralles was from a wealthy merchant family in Havana. He was fluent in English, and had extensive business dealings with [Robert Morris](#), the chief financier of the American Revolution. He remained in the colonies as an informal diplomat and orchestrated the import and export trade between the colonies and Cuba. Miralles was well acquainted with George and Martha Washington, and numerous members of Congress.

In 1779, after the Spanish declaration of war against the British, Havana became the staging point for the fierce fighting against the British in North and Central America. Bernardo de Gálvez led two fleets against the British to capture Pensacola, Florida, finally succeeding in May 1781. In addition to providing port facilities, supplies, and financing, Cuban militia, including free Afro-Cuban soldiers, fought in the battle.

Havana and its citizens played a dramatic role in the 1781 [Battle of Yorktown](#). In August 1781, the French Navy was sailing from the Caribbean to Virginia to join the French Army and the colonists against the British. The French needed hard currency for supplies to sail, and the struggling United States Continental Army needed money for payroll and supplies. The Spanish authorities in Havana had prepared to aid the French and North Americans, planning to finance the fleet with silver pesos from the fabulously rich [Mexican](#) mines shipped through the port of Veracruz. These wooden sailing ships, full of barrels of coins and dependent on Caribbean sea winds to drive their canvas sails, had not yet arrived. The official Spanish Treasury in Havana was empty.

Notices were hastily posted throughout the walled city that citizens of Havana who wished to loan money to the Spanish government for the war effort should bring their currency immediately to the city Treasury. Within six hours, the huge sum of 500,000 Spanish pesos was sent by twenty-seven men and one woman. The coins were loaded on a ship of the French fleet anchored near the Cuban coast.

Guided by Cuban pilots for the early part of their journey, the fleet continued north through the dangerous Bahamian Channel to reach the Chesapeake Bay on August 30 1781. The timing that was perilously close for the lengthy chains of 18th century war maneuvers. These funds were used to purchase the supplies and payroll for the Continental Army troops in the Battle of Yorktown, in which the British were defeated. [Yorktown](#) was one of the few battles that the North Americans won, and was the last major battle of the American Revolutionary War.

Timeline of Key Assistance by the Spanish and Hispanic Americans

The following is a timeline of the assistance provided by the Spanish and Hispanic Americans. Please visit the [Timeline at www.OurAmericanHistory.com](http://www.OurAmericanHistory.com).

1776

- The Spanish financed the company Rodriguez Hortalez et Cie with the French, each providing 1 million livres to the venture. The Spanish King, Carlos III, was uncle to the French King, Louis XVI, and the two were further united by the Bourbon Compact. This trading company smuggled tens of thousands of uniforms, rifles, cannons, mortars and other desperately needed equipment to the North American Continental Army.
- Continental Army General Charles Lee sent soldiers to Governor Luis de Unzaga in Louisiana, to request military supplies, including gunpowder. The Spanish provided the supplies. The British naval blockade of the 13 colonies hampered the import of supplies from Europe and the Caribbean.

1777

- Benjamin Franklin sent a report to the Committee of Secret Correspondence from Paris in March 1777. Franklin writes of the assistance given by the Spanish at this early date, including that colonial ships would be admitted into Havana under most favored nation status and that the Spanish would arrange a credit for the colonies through Holland. Franklin also noted that three thousand barrels of gunpowder were available in New Orleans, and that the merchants in Bilbao “had orders to ship for us such necessaries as we might want.”
- Bernardo de Gálvez, who replaced Luis de Unzaga as Governor of Louisiana, received orders to secretly send military supplies to the North Americans through New Orleans. Gálvez worked with [Oliver Pollock](#), North American financier and merchant, to smuggle supplies up the Mississippi to the Continental Army.
- Juan de Miralles, Spanish agent, traveled from Havana to Philadelphia. Miralles increased international trade between the colonies and Havana, providing favorable terms of credit to the merchants of Philadelphia. The colonial merchants were able to sell their natural resources and agricultural products for needed silver and gold.

1778

- The Spanish continued to send military supplies up the Mississippi, including to St. Louis. The Continental Army, led by George Rogers Clark, elder brother of William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, was fighting the British in Missouri, Indiana, and other parts of the West.
- North American naval privateers attacked British merchant ships across the Atlantic Ocean, sheltering in Spanish ports for repairs, supplies, and to sell their cargos. Naval privateers were authorized by Congress to raid British ships and seize supplies that were either needed by the Continentals or that could be sold for hard currency.
- Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia wrote to Bernardo de Gálvez, requesting woolen blankets, tarps, and munitions. The British naval blockade of the colonies continued to prevent the importation of supplies.

1779

- Spain declared war on British, opening another strategic front against the British from San Carlos, Nicaragua to Pensacola, Florida. Hispanic Americans from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras fought in the campaign.
- Texas vaqueros (cowboys) organized the first official out of state cattle drive to supply Bernardo Gálvez and his Army fighting against the British.
- Bernardo de Gálvez, the Louisiana militia, Spanish Army and volunteers defeated the British at Baton Rouge, capturing several posts on the Mississippi River.

- John Adams and son traveled to Spain, assisted and financed by the Gardoqui family, the Basque merchants who smuggled supplies to the Continental Army. Adams is greeted by many Spanish dignitaries.

1780

- King Carlos III proclaimed that all his subjects in the Americas must contribute to the war against the British through a special tax, including those in California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico.

- Bernardo de Gálvez and his army captured Mobile, Alabama, from the British.

- Spanish, Guatemalans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans continued to fight against the British in lengthy campaigns across Central America.

- Money and supplies were sent to the Central American battles from Peru and New Granada (Panama, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela).

1781

- The citizens of Havana, Cuba financed the North Americans and French with an emergency collection of silver and gold. The French war fleet sailed from the Caribbean to Virginia with the money from Cuba.

- Shipments from Bilbao, Spain continued, defying the British blockade. Notification recorded of five ships with guns, iron and blankets sent to the North American Continental Army.

- Spanish and Cubans, including Afro-Cuban militiamen, defeat the British at the Battle of Pensacola, led by Bernardo de Gálvez.

- The Spanish assisted the French Navy in the Caribbean, enabling them to deploy all their warships at the strategic Battle of the Capes. The French defeated the British, preventing rescue ships from reaching British General Cornwallis, who was trapped at Yorktown with his army. The British surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown.

- George and Martha Washington spent Christmas holidays at the home of the Spanish diplomat Francisco Rendón in Philadelphia.

1782

- Spanish and Hondurans defeated the British Army on Roatán, Honduras, ending British influence in the Gulf of Honduras.

- The British Navy tightened its blockade of the eastern seaboard of the United States. Francisco Rendón requested additional trading privileges for the North Americans, to allow them to ship their exports through the Mississippi to markets in Spanish New Orleans.

- Spanish forces from Havana captured New Providence (Nassau) Bahamas and its 600 British soldiers. Spain and France launch the Grand Assault of the Siege of Gibraltar, forcing the British Navy to divert naval resources from blockading North America.

1783-1784

- Spain, France, and Britain signed the preliminary articles of peace, establishing a military armistice among themselves and Britain and the US.
- Spain officially recognized the independence of the United States of America.
- St. Augustine, Florida, was formally transferred back to Spain by the British. British officials hosted the Spanish Governor, Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, with a ball on July 14, 1784. Festivities were held in Madrid, Spain to celebrate the end of the war.
- Definitive treaty of peace was signed by Britain, US, France, Spain, and the Netherlands in September 1783. The Treaty was ratified by the US Congress on January 14, 1784, formally ending the American Revolutionary War.

Preparing to Teach this Lesson

Please read through our site, which has information the important [People](#), [Events](#), and [Places](#) in the American Revolutionary War. Start with the [Timeline](#), which takes you from 1776 to 1783, and provides a year-by-year overview of the contribution of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans.

We have posted copies of several documents written in the 18th century from the Spanish and French military leaders that attest to the role of the Cubans in assisting to finance the 1781 Battle of Yorktown at www.OurAmericanHistory.com [Resource page](#). We have several recommendations for books posted at the [Resource Center](#), though the selection is limited.

Additional resources are at the Smithsonian Legacy Exhibition features the [Youth and Family Guide](#) with information on the role of the Spanish in the American Revolutionary War. The site is in Spanish and English.

Suggested Activities

Activity I. Overview of the chronology of the American Revolutionary War.

Review the [Timeline](#) of the Spanish, Hispanic Americans and North Americans in the American Revolutionary War at www.OurAmericanHistory.com. Draw three lines down the on the chalkboard, separating it into three different sections. Write “North Americans” as the title on one side, “Supplies for the War” in the middle, and “Spanish and Hispanic Americans” as the title of the third section.

Review the key events in North America with the students, asking them for the events that they remember from previous history lessons, writing the events in chronological order in the “North American” section.

Ask the students for any events that they know about the Spanish and Hispanic Americans helping the North Americans during the American Revolutionary War. Then review the events from the Timeline of the assistance by Spanish and Hispanic Americans, placing these in the “Spanish and Hispanic Americans” section of the chalkboard.

Activity 2. Understanding the 18th Century Economies in North and South America

Tell the students that they will now take an imaginary journey to the late 18th century. North and South America as they know them now were very different places. The United States of America was only thirteen small colonies on the Eastern seaboard. Review the states that were then part of the United States of America with the students, so that they have a better sense of the size of the country during the 18th century. If a map of the United States is available, please review the area on the map. (The 13 colonies comprised: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.)

The US Continental dollar was very weak, and many colonist that had hard currency used silver pesos and other currencies. The United States of America only had 2.5 million people, about one-third of whom were African American slaves.

In contrast, the Spanish Empire in Central and South American was much larger and much wealthier. The population was estimated at 20 to 22 million people and cities such as Havana and Mexico City were larger than the cities in the United States. The silver mines in Mexico were producing record amounts of silver, and the Cuban economy was flourishing.

Ask the students to imagine what life would be like in the late 18th century. A few key thought points:

- What types of jobs would their parents and adult family members have? What types of jobs would they have, since many children also worked? The majority of people, about 98%, worked in agriculture. Many of the leading revolutionaries were farmers, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Other occupations were in the shipping business and processing natural resources.
- How would they travel to school or to visit friends? Most people walked everywhere. Very few people could afford a horse and carriage. There were no interstate highways connecting cities. During one of the first call-ups for volunteers in 1775, 96 young men walked over 500 miles from Shepherdstown, West Virginia to Boston, Massachusetts in 26 days. (Yes, you read this correctly, the volunteers walked over 500 miles in 26 days.)

- What types of shoes and clothing would they have? The average person owned very few clothes, one or two good suits for the men and a few dresses and undergarments for the girls. There were no shopping malls or online catalogs. Clothing was either woven at home or imported from England or other countries in Europe. During the period of protest against the British before the start of the Revolutionary War, North Americans boycotted British imports and spun their own threads and cloth. Shortages of shoes and clothing for uniforms were a constant problem throughout the War. Can the students imagine being so committed to a political cause that they would make all of their own clothes rather than buy them from manufacturers that they chose to boycott?
- What did it mean for the United States to be a colony of the British? As a colony, the United States produced and exported raw materials and natural resources such as timber, and had few industries. Many of the processed goods, such as steel and the ingredients for gunpowder, were imported. The British Parliament also passed laws making it illegal for the United States to produce goods such as steel.

Review the supplies that an Army would need to fight a war in the 18th century, asking the students to think of what an eighteenth century soldier would need to fight a war. List these items in the middle section of the chalkboard, marked “Supplies for the War”. Items should include uniforms, shoes, guns, tents, bullets, gunpowder, cannons, cannon balls, swords, and bayonets.

Read the quote from General George Washington to the students in which he worried about the supplies that could be provided for his Army when they faced the well-armed and well-supplied British Army on the battlefield: “without any money in our treasury, powder in our magazines, arms in our stores...and by and by, when we shall be called upon to take the field, shall not have a tent to lie in.”

Discuss this quote with the students. What would it be like to go against a powerful Army that had large supplies of gunpowder and weapons, when your Army did not? How would you fight without other weapons, such as cannons, when the opposing Army had them? How do they think that the soldiers would feel to fight for a country that could not afford to give them a uniform, and often could not pay them on time? What leadership characteristics did George Washington and his staff possess to keep an Army together under these circumstances?

This discussion is critical to understanding why the Spanish assistance was so valuable. In 1776, as indicated in the Timeline, the Spanish and French Kings financed the trading company, Rodriguez Hortalez et Cie, to begin smuggling guns, cannons, cannon balls, tents, complete uniforms, and many other supplies to the North American soldiers. This assistance from the Spanish and Hispanic Americans continued throughout the Revolutionary War.

Activity 3. The Spanish War against the British in 1779 - 1782

The American Revolutionary War was one of the wars that the British had to fight during this time period. In June of 1779, the Spanish also declared war against the British. The Spanish fought battles against the British to regain their territory in Florida, which they had settled early in the 16th century. One of the first campaigns was organized in New Orleans, then part of the Spanish empire, by Bernardo de Gálvez.

Gálvez assembled one of the most diverse forces in North America in his campaign against the British. The men were new recruits from Mexico, free African-Americans and biracial African-Americans, experienced Spanish soldiers in the Louisiana Regiment, colonial North American volunteers, local citizens from the German and Acadian (French Canadians relocated to New Orleans during the French and Indian War) communities, and native Americans, probably Choctaw and Chickasaw.

[Oliver Pollock](#), an Irish American immigrant who helped to finance the American Revolution, rode with Gálvez as his aide de camp. Pollock helped to negotiate the surrender of the British fort at Natchez, Mississippi. Supported by a large war fleet from Spain and the Cuban militias, Gálvez succeeded in attacking Pensacola, Florida, and defeating the British Army. The British surrendered in Pensacola in May of 1781, several months before the British defeat in Yorktown, Virginia.

The Spanish and Hispanic Americans also battled against the British in Central America from 1779 to 1783. Major military campaigns were fought in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, which King Carlos III viewed as a key strategic region.

The Spanish and French launched the Siege of Gibraltar in 1782, and the British had to redirect their naval forces from North America to Europe. Although the final battles were over in North America, the British had continued in their efforts to blockade the North American ports. Their objective was to weaken the United States by cutting off international trade. These battles with the Spanish and Hispanic Americans forced the British to divert resources from North American.

The British also had to fight in India when the Indian people revolted against their rule. This was known as the First Anglo-Maratha War in 1774-1783. The French declared war on the British, and began sending troops to fight with the North Americans in 1778, when Admiral Comte D'Estaing arrived at the Delaware Capes with 16 ships and 4,000 French soldiers. The American Revolutionary War was part of a much larger global conflict.

Discuss with students the concept of an interconnected world, in which the events and political or economic upheaval in one country impacts another country or countries. The United States of America was struggling to win the American Revolutionary War. What could have happened if the British had been able to send all of their soldiers, money, warships, and other supplies to fight against the North Americans? What do the

students think that impact was of the wars that were fought against the British in Central America, Spain (Gibraltar), and India? The world was very interconnected in the 18th century, as it is today.

During his first battles in 1779, Bernardo de Gálvez commanded one of the most diverse forces in North America. Discuss this aspect with the students. What would be the challenges to commanding such a diverse force? What would be the benefits? What leadership characteristics are important to be successful in this situation?

Activity 4. What *is* History?

In the past three activities, we have reviewed a number of events that were important in the history of the American Revolutionary War. Many of these events and people are not included in the standard North American history textbooks, and few people have the perspective and knowledge of the contribution of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans to the American Revolutionary War. What is history, and who decides the history that we learn? Why are these decisions important to us?

Discuss with students the importance of a fair and balanced point of view in history. If the contributions of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans are not recognized in many textbooks, is this perspective fair and balanced? How do you think that historians will view the contributions of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans in the future, as more people become aware of these historical facts? Will history books treat the topic in the same manner in ten or twenty years?

Discuss with the students the concept that history is influenced by the historians' point of view as to what is important to include in the history books and how these facts are viewed. For example, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned slaves, yet they were regarded as revolutionaries who defended the right to be free from British rule. During the 18th century, few people questioned the right to hold slaves. Those people who did question slavery were often regarded as disloyal or treasonous. From our 21st century perspective, slavery is an evil; from the 18th century point of view, it was an acceptable economic activity. How do we, as a society, determine the point of view for the history that we learn? How do we determine what is important to study as history?

What are other examples of different perspectives on events and on history?

Immigration is one example. During the 18th century, immigrants were very welcome in the United States of America. A number of the key people in the American Revolution were immigrants, including [Alexander Hamilton](#) (whose portrait is on the US \$10 Bill), [Robert Morris](#), [Oliver Pollock](#), [Thomas Paine](#), and [Friedrich Von Steuben](#). Many of the troops that fought with George Washington were immigrants, including the Spanish officer [Jorge Farragut](#). How have our historic perspectives on immigrants and immigration changed from the 18th century to the 21st century? What are other examples of different perspectives from different points in history?