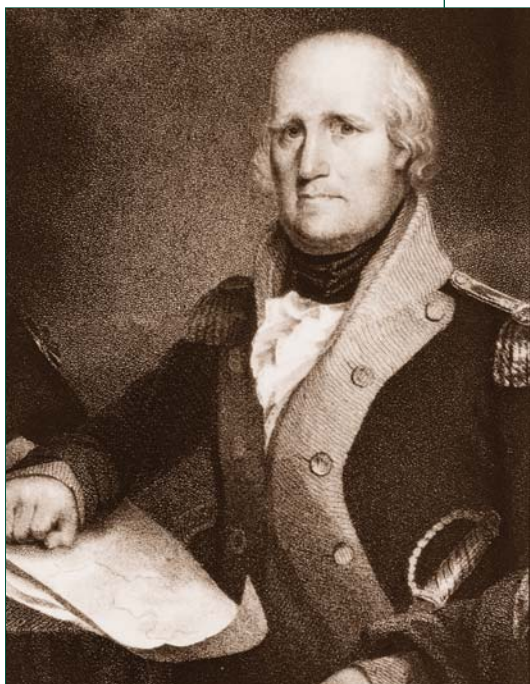


Lagniappe

New Orleans merchant Oliver Pollock created the dollar sign, "\$," by modifying a Mexican symbol.



Above: During the American Revolution, American George Rogers Clark benefitted from the support of the Spanish of Louisiana.

Louisiana in the American Revolution

As you read, look for:

- Spanish Louisiana's role in the American Revolution, and
- vocabulary terms **neutral**, **militia**, and **siege**.

Tensions between Great Britain and its American colonies continued to build. The American Revolution began in April 1775 when “the shot heard round the world” was fired in Lexington, Massachusetts. The colonists resisted the British troops sent to seize their weapons. On July 4, 1776, the American colonies declared their independence from King George III and Great Britain. They intended to be free.

Spain Supports the American Revolution

Spain was glad to see its old enemy Great Britain in trouble. The Spanish secretly supported the Americans with supplies from New Orleans. As Spain was pushed closer to the war, a strong governor with a strong military background was needed in Louisiana.

In 1777, Spain named Bernardo de Gálvez (gal VAZ) as the next colonial governor of Louisiana. The American Revolution required most of his attention, and other officials handled colonial business. Gálvez had to aid the Americans in secret as long as Spain remained officially **neutral** (not taking sides). The Spanish governor of Louisiana prepared for war and waited for word from his commander in Cuba.

From New Orleans, American agent Oliver Pollock directed the secret Spanish assistance to the Continental Congress. An experienced trader throughout the West Indies, Pollock had helped the Spanish in Louisiana set up trade with other Spanish ports. Because of this connection, he was allowed to collect guns, gunpowder, medicine, and cloth for the Americans. Most of these supplies went to help George Rogers Clark win the western front for the Americans.

Spain Enters the War

In 1779, Spain entered the war. Spain joined France in the war against the British, but it did not become an ally of the Americans as France had. The Spanish would not directly support the Americans because they would not agree to stay between the Atlantic Ocean and the Allegheny Mountains. Also, the Spanish king was reluctant to openly support a rebellion against another monarchy.

Soon, Gálvez received orders to force the British from the Mississippi River, Mobile, and Pensacola. He went on the offensive. He wanted to weaken the British before they could seize New Orleans, which was being used as a base for American ships. If the British took New Orleans, they would have access to the Mississippi River and the British forts along the upper river. The British would then have an advantage in the war.

To stop the British, Gálvez organized a force of Spanish soldiers and local **militia** (citizen-soldiers). Men between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five were required to serve in the militia. The Louisiana militia included wealthy merchants and planters from New Orleans, the Isleños, the Acadians, the Germans, rural farmers, and free men of color. Slaves and the Choctaw served as scouts at the front of the line.

Gálvez left New Orleans on August 27, 1779, with almost 1,500 men. The heavy summer heat, mosquitoes, and the thick canebrake made traveling miserable. More than half of the men got sick along the way. After marching over a hundred miles, they reached Fort Bute at Manchac. On September 7, 1779, Gálvez and his army captured the British fort.

From there, Gálvez took his men upriver. The next British fort, New Richmond, was located at the site of present-day Baton Rouge. Gálvez seized the fort on September 21, and the British commander also surrendered Fort Panmure at Natchez. The Spanish had taken all the British forts along the Mississippi in British West Florida. Gálvez had captured 28 British officers and 550 troops; he had lost one man and had two wounded.

Gálvez next began a naval attack to take the British forts on the Gulf of Mexico. His main target was Pensacola, the capital of British West Florida. Before the war, the British commander had been visited by a Spanish officer, who said he came to discuss runaway slaves. Actually, Gálvez had sent him to spy on that fort and the fort at Mobile.

Before he could take Pensacola, however, Gálvez first had to capture Mobile. In January 1780, he set out with thirteen ships but was delayed by a hurricane. The previous year, a hurricane had hit and destroyed Gálvez's supplies as he was preparing to make his land march to capture the British forts.



Above: Bernardo de Gálvez was governor of Louisiana during the American Revolution. When Spain entered the war in 1779, Gálvez attacked and defeated British forces along the lower Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

Map 26 Louisiana in the American Revolution

Map Skill: What separated
British West Florida from
Spanish Louisiana?

After this second hurricane, Gálvez reorganized his ships, supplies, and troops and captured Mobile after a four-day battle. He was then ready to attack Pensacola. He himself went to Cuba to assemble the forces and supplies he needed.

In October 1780, Gálvez left Cuba with a huge fleet of sixty-four ships. Unbelievably, a third hurricane struck! After that storm, Gálvez regrouped and headed for the fort at Pensacola. On March 9, 1781, the Spanish began a **siege** of Fort George, surrounding the fort and preventing supplies from reaching it. On May 8, a Spanish shell blew a hole in the fort. Gálvez then stepped up the attack. On May 10, the British general surrendered, giving up British access to the Gulf of Mexico. Losing these forts and the Gulf of Mexico kept the British from making further attacks in the southwest.

For his victory and his bravery, the king of Spain honored Bernardo de Gálvez with a royal title. He also was allowed to add a battleship and the motto *Yo Solo* ("I alone") to his coat of arms. His success is still celebrated today when the descendants of the Louisiana militia meet to honor the Spanish hero of the American Revolution. The United States honored his contributions with a statue in the nation's capital.

The War Ends

When the war ended, Spain was rewarded with much of the territory it wanted in the Treaty of Paris of 1783. Florida became Spanish again. The Spanish king, Carlos III, now held both banks of the Mississippi. This marked the height of Spain's power in the Americas.





To protect these possessions, the Spanish government improved the *Camino Real* ("Road of the King"). This road connected Natchitoches, New Orleans, and St. Louis with San Antonio. San Antonio, the capital of Spanish Texas, had become a major horse market. The route from Texas to Louisiana was used by *vaqueros* (cowboys) to drive over 9,000 head of longhorn cattle to New Orleans. This beef fed the Spanish soldiers during the American Revolution. Today, Highway 90 in Louisiana follows the route of part of this old Spanish trail.

Above: Historians have called the siege of Pensacola one of the most brilliantly executed battles of the war.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did Spain support the American Revolution?
2. How did Spain help the Americans before it entered the war?
3. What was Gálvez ordered to do after Spain entered the war?
4. What were the results of Gálvez's military actions?
5. What part of present-day Louisiana became part of the Spanish colony after the war?

Lagniappe

In 1785, Gálvez became viceroy of New Spain. In that position, he ordered a survey of the Gulf Coast. The mapmaker named the biggest bay on the Texas coast "Bahía de Galveston," a name later changed to Galveston.