

Fernando de Leyba

The Ceuta native that changed
the American Revolutionary War

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St. Louis may be many things in the collective imagination. A city attached to a river. **One of the big engines of the heavy industry in the USA, already in decline.** An important passage in the French colonial history. The location of the Olympic Games in 1904, which were the first ones celebrated outside Europe. **And even the birthplace of T.S. Eliot, Nobel Prize winner in Literature.** But, for almost no one, when one first thinks about the City in Missouri, it is a place where **Spain left deep traces for 40 years of its history.** Four decades that were not truncated, mainly, thanks to the performance of a Spanish guard that has brushed off anonymity for centuries.

Fernando de Leyba y Cordova Vizcaigaña is one of those unknown heroes, without a face, without a voice, who roams as a spectre through the forgotten Spanish history. His chains make sounds being pulled over the books and chronicles, but until **recently, no one has made the effort to put all the pieces together to understand the importance of this character.** For years, it was even thought that he was born in Barcelona because his father was posted there, but thanks to the researcher Kristine L. Sjostrom, and the chronicler Jose Luis Gomez Barcelona, who found his birth certificate, we can be certain today that **Fernando de Leyba was born in Ceuta, on July 24, 1734, in the heart of a large family with long noble military tradition from Antequera (Malaga)** on his father's side and the daughter of a Notary Public in the City of Ceuta on his mother's side. The Plaza de África was healing at that moment from the wounds that this thirty-three year siege by Moroccan forces had provoked and, like Leyba himself, was busy creating its own history.



Map of Saint Louis, 1780.

Leyba was the fifth of seven brothers and he **found his future in the Army**, that since the Bourbons arrived in Spain, was subject to many changes trying to make the career professional according to the needs of the Catholic Monarchy. The Ceuta native entered his father's profession, Geronimo de Leyba y Cordova, as a cadet in the **Spanish infantry regiment when he was seventeen, staying there until he became second lieutenant of the company (1756)**, later flag second lieutenant (1763) and after five years, captain. The fact that he took so long to enter the Army, when it was possible to do so at the age of twelve, and that the entering date matched his father's death, makes us speculate about him choosing this career because of his family situation.

During his career of almost thirty years, **the soldier would serve in the garrisons of Oran, New Orleans, Arkansas, Saint Louis and Cuba.** He was in the Aragon regiment defending La Havana from an English attack, in the context of



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the Seven Years' War, **when he was taken prisoner by them during the defense of the Morro Castle in 1762.** The conflict in which the Spain of Carlos III had positioned itself with France was resolved with serious losses for the Empire. The King ceded La Florida to Great Britain to recover La Havana and Manila, which were lost

in a matter of months. The France of Louis XV, for its part, compensated its battered ally **with the poisoned candy of Louisiana**, a territory that the Gauls were not in a position to keep after years of sterile struggle against the indigenous population and border tensions with the Spanish and British.



Defense of the Morro Castle in La Havana (Jose Rufo, 1763).

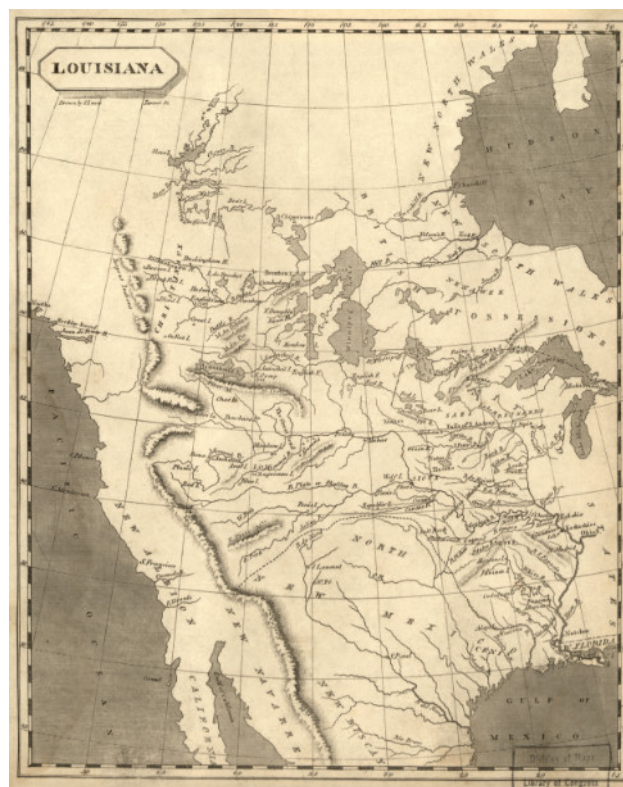


A DESERTED PROVINCE

Louisiana had an area of more than two million squared kilometers, but **when France ceded it to Spain, less than twenty thousand colonists lived there.** That population did not stop increasing in the following decades, partly due to the **emigration of Andalusians and Canary Islanders** who came from the other side of the Atlantic.

This vast province was increasing its mining resources, and, under French control, they had been languishing for a century **in the colonial failure that was the whole New France.** The Spanish governors tried to avoid the mistakes of their predecessors and distanced themselves as far as possible from the French and British colonial models, starting with improving relations with the Indian tribes. It was no different from what the Spaniards had been doing for centuries elsewhere. **The Spanish Crown had a long tradition of commercial and military agreements with local tribes.** As stated by Abelardo Levaggi, a historian specialized in Law, “the tradition to celebrate the peace treaties spread to all the borders in the Indies, and during the whole Hispanic period, as far as being also carried out -at least in some cases- in the independent era.” **Many of these treaties were still in effect when territorial sovereignty passed to American hands.**

This improvement in the treatment of the indigenous people in Louisiana was also helped by the absolute prohibition of their enslavement in Spanish territory, a principle rooted in the **Testament of Isabella the Catholic and in pioneering legislation for the protection of rights.** Although the prohibition against subjecting Indians to slavery was strictly applied to the acquisition of



Map of Louisiana, 1804.

new human beings and those already enslaved were left in a kind of limbo, Spanish legislation helped the number to reach zero over the decades. Of the 161 native slaves that there were in French Louisiana in 1732, **there were barely around one hundred in times of Governor Bernardo de Galvez and, at the end of the Spanish presence in that area, there were no native slaves registered.** This policy caused many black slaves to claim their own freedom before the Spanish courts on the grounds that they had some kind of native ancestry. **Some of these cases would even be heard by U.S. courts after the U.S. acquisition of Louisiana.**



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When he returned to his military profession after his brief imprisonment, **Fernando de Leyba was assigned to the command of the third rifle company of the fixed regiment of Louisiana**, located in New Orleans, as captain. He arrived in this territory hostile to Spanish rule in 1769 with the expedition of the Irishman Alejandro O'Reilly, who was ordered by the king to regain control of the province after the French colonists rose up against the governor Antonio de Ulloa, more scientist than administrator, whom they managed to expel the previous year. **The captain from Ceuta was assigned the position in Our Lady of Arkansas, 800 kilometers from New Orleans**, where he found a fort in terrible conditions, the stockade and barracks hanging by a thread, soldiers that were not paid and a chronic lack of flour in their storehouses.



Antonio de Ulloa (Andres Cortes y Aguilar, around 1856).

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In addition to solving these emergencies, the Ceuta native had to face the same inconveniences as the French, who had cemented their relationship with the **Quapaw Indians (East Arkansas-Upper Louisiana) with daily gifts in exchange for peace and calm**. The thousandth conflict came up when the chief of the Quapaw Cazenonpoint rejected a Spanish medal because it was smaller than the one that he once received from the French.

De Leyba had to get hold of a larger one and new gifts to convince the Indian chief not to slit the throat of the Spanish garrison. In order to avoid this type of snubs in the future, **Bernardo de Gálvez would ask Madrid to issue new, larger silver medals** (54 mm. diameter instead of the prior 36 of the old model). However, the new bigger commendation medals, of which very few are preserved, one of them in the Lazaro Galdiano



Museum, created a new problem due to the lovely receipt. **They became so demanded by the Indian chiefs that the governor of Louisiana had to limit its granting to one per chief and per tribe.**

That a military officer would pay so much attention to alliances with local tribes had a reason beyond good neighborliness. **De Leyba had received clear instruction from Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga**, substitute of Alejandro O'Reilly as governor in Louisiana, claiming to improve the relations with Osages and other Native American tribes who were close to the Mississippi river.



Captain general of Venezuela (1777-1782, Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga.

This general from Malaga, who was the architect of the world's first bilingual public education system in New Orleans, earned the nickname of the *Conciliateur* (conciliatory) for **maintaining social peace with the French Creoles of Louisiana and allowing freedom of trade with an initiative that boosted the economy of New Orleans** and St. Louis. When cries of revolution began to be heard in Boston, Unzaga and the captain general of Cuba, Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, **were the first to sense the magnitude of the uprising that was brewing in British territory.** They ordered to reinforce the defenses of the province and to look for a way to attract the greatest number of allied natives to the protection of the extensive and almost uninhabited Louisiana.

Fernando de Leyba was not only the spearhead of their plans on the northern frontier, but also the sharpest ear of Unzaga and Bucareli, who since **1770 had been creating a wide network of spies, recruited among fishermen, merchants and clergymen, to find out what was happening in the Thirteen Colonies.** Without knowing the scope of his superiors' plans, the captain from Ceuta gave weapons to several tribes and secretly helped the American rebels, who in 1775 aimed at London with their muskets. What several years earlier begun as a protest against the tax regime became, based on the repression and lack of tact by the royal authorities, **an unequal fight between North American bad-equipped and untrained militias against the powerful army of George III**, who, however, had the huge hindrance of directing the operations from the other side of the Atlantic, five thousand kilometers away. A war that would last for eight years of fighting **in which Spain did more than just clandestinely supply blankets, ammunition, cloth for uniforms and quinine** (a much-demanded remedy against high fevers) to the revolutionaries... Quite a bit more.



With the Revolutionary War in process, the captain became lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana from July 14, 1778, until he died.

Health problems kept Leyba away from the frontier and the action for three years, when he lived in New Orleans. With the Revolutionary War in process, **the captain became lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana from July 14, 1778, until he died.** Guardian and administrator of a hostile territory that extended from the Ohio river mouth to Canada, and from the bank of the Mississippi river to the Rocky Mountains, **and where an ideal mix of a strong hand and a left hand was required to keep the peace with the border territories without losing the respect of the tribes.** In the middle of the crossfire, even further North than Arkansas, the Crown deliberately threw in an experienced and mordant soldier.

The small village of Saint Louis de Illinoises, its base, **had been founded in the heat of the lucrative fur trade business in 1764 and its population, of barely 700 neighbors, consisted mostly of French Creoles.** In general, the percentage of Spanish population was very low in the whole province and never exceeded 15% of the total, which further complicated the room for maneuver.

They were not the most reliable allies to go to war in such a remote place that was so enclosed in a strategic point, **and less so when a few years ago Louisiana had shown its own revolutionary longings,** but that was the only thing Spain could count on to protect itself against what was to come.

When France and Spain, at different rates, entered the American Revolutionary War to make up for the prior blows and weaken the British, **De Leyba became more exposed than anyone, in the middle of the enemy lines with his men and his wife and his two young daughters,** who accompanied him to his dangerous destination on a 93-day journey up the river to Saint Louis. Entrenched, without reinforcements, in his particular Thermopylae pass, the orders from New Orleans demanded that he keep the flag of St. Andrew, with red blades on a white background, flying at all costs.



AT THE EPICENTER OF THE WAR

On July 04, 1776, the representatives of the Thirteen Colonies gathered together in Philadelphia to declare their independence from England, a fact that is globally known as the founding of the United States that, however, disguised more complex matters that would have a huge effect on Spain. The document that came from the pen of Thomas Jefferson was in a way, more than a declaration of Independence, a declaration of dependence on France and Spain. **The new republic desperately needed military support from the large European monarchies** to defeat the powerful British forces.

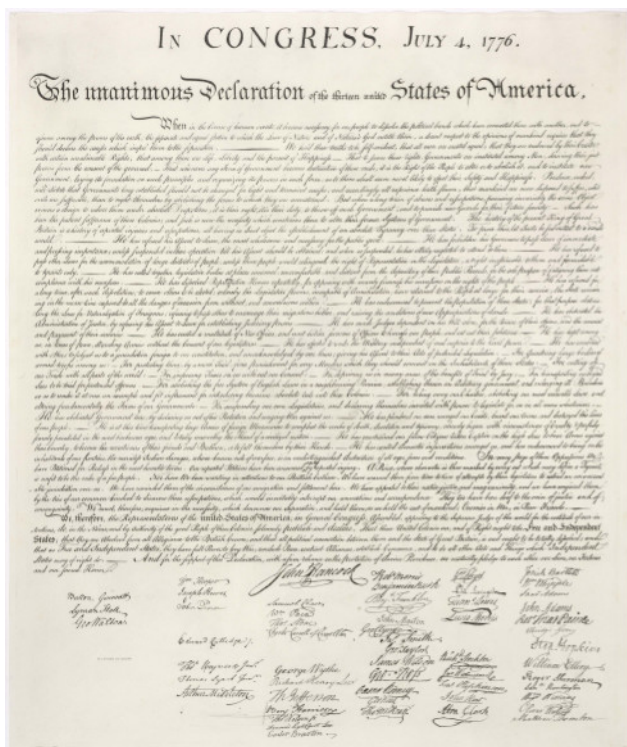
Several months before that friendship declaration, the American Revolution was agonizing in front of the much superior British army.

New York had fallen, Philadelphia was walking in thin ice, and **George Washington's nation lacked a navy, artillery, military preparedness and even gunpowder**. "The Army didn't even have five cartridges of powder per man. Everyone wondered why we hardly ever fired the guns: we couldn't afford it", wrote Benjamin Franklin, another one of the revolutionary leaders that clamored for external support. The reply was not long to come. France soon committed to send ammunition, money and supplies for the insurgents. Then they went straight for the British jugular across the globe.

Carlos III of Spain became more desirable than Louis XVI of France, who thought only of avenging past affronts without considering the political consequences. Nourishing a republican state in the New World was an obvious risk for the monarchies and for the future of the European powers. Who described best **the suicidal path assumed by old France until it sent its kings to the guillotine** was the viscountess of Fars-Fausselandry who proclaimed:

"The American motive seemed ours, we felt proud of their victories, we groaned with their defeats, we seized their bulletins and we read them in all our houses. None of us considered the danger that the New World could mean for the Old."

The American revolution was, for people such as the Count of Floridablanca, **a challenge to "the sacred rights of all the sovereigns in their respective territories."** The fear of a new defeat facing the British squadron and the attraction of the neutrality agreed with London was added to that. In spite of everything, discrete negotiations were opened with the rebel leaders:



Manuscript copy of the United States Declaration of Independence
Reproduction of the William Stone's facsimile.



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Portrait of Carlos III of Spain
(Anton Raphael Mengs, circa 1765).

the Count of Aranda in Paris, John Jay in Madrid and the trader Juan Miralles in Havana. **There was no decisive breakthrough in the talks until the arrival in Spain in 1777 of Arthur Lee**, envoy of the Thirteen Colonies, who managed to extract indirect aid for the rebels at a top secret summit.

The substitute of Unzaga, his brother-in-law Mr. Bernardo de Galvez y Madrid, substitute governor in Louisiana in New Orleans, ordered captain Fernando de Leyba to keep him informed about “all news regarding what was happening in the English part concerning the war of that power with the colonist” and, also, **he commanded him the secret correspondence with an esteemed**

rebel chief, George Rogers Clark, who he shall help as much as possible and provide him with gunpowder and weapons on credit. The highest category American officer in the Northwest border begun his crusade against the British in charge of the militia of Kentucky (part of Virginia at that time) and became famous due to the

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famous conquests of Kaskaskia (1778) and Vincennes (1779), **that decisively weakened the British influence in the Northwest Territory**. The Spanish ammunition transported down the river had much to do with the success of Clark, who would become the **strongest military commander on the east side of the Mississippi and hold the present states of Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky under his responsibility**.

Clark visited Saint Louis of Illinois short later after his victory in Kaskaskia and he was received with artillery salutes by the Spanish garrison. The captain from Ceuta organized dinners and festivities for thirty people, with a ball and celebrations, **after which he lodged the militiamen in his residence with "as much**



decency as possible". The American did not spare any praise for the treatment received during this gala visit:

"As I had never been accompanied by Spanish before, I was pleasantly surprised with my expectations; because I did not find the peculiar mistrust in that nation, I did not find the minimum sign of it; having so much freedom, almost excessive, was highly pleasant..."

He found in De Leyba an intelligent and affable man, who was concerned about the American cause, even beyond the instructions received. Before the terrible state of the equipment and clothes of the North American army, **the Spaniard allowed Clark to establish a Continental Store in Saint Louis with fabrics and items sent from New Orleans**, which were secured with De Leyba's own credit. "But what was I to do... seeing that not even the main chief, for all the American documents he was carrying, could find a shirt to cover his nakedness, if not to present myself to his aid," he would justify himself.

"This gentleman is very concerned about the States, much more than I expected", stated Clark, **who recommended the Spaniard to strengthen its defenses before a possible attack from Detroit.** Nevertheless, they were both aware that while Spain continued officially out of the fight, the arrival of funds and troops in dribs and drabs would make it impossible to have an effective opposition against the English. **De Leyba was driven to despair due to his precarious means and the lack of support from the settlers of Saint Louis**, who did not see the threat as close enough to invest in a fort. What is paradoxical about that matter is that if Spain manifestly entered the war, Saint Louis and other forts would receive reinforcements, yes, but the English would also arrive behind or, in the worst-case scenario, ahead of them.

The Spanish position did not take much longer to be defined. The last hurdle to reach a formal compromise with the American Congress was overcome by Carlos III in the spring of 1779, **when he signed the Treaty of Aranjuez, which ratified the alliance with France and committed the Empire to firmly support the rebels.** The failure of the intervention of Spain, the benefits assured by France in case of the Spanish entering the conflict and, finally, an intense press campaign from newspapers such as El Mercurio in favor of belligerency, were key factors to tip the scales. Spain declared war on England on June 16.

General Washington wrote on September 3 to general John Sullivan announcing that the rebel cause had gained an important ally: "I have the pleasure of informing you that Spain has finally taken a decisive part... It is expected that this formidable division of the House of Bourbon does not fail in establishing in short-term the North American independence." **Spain competed the challenge against England in the Mediterranean (Gibraltar and Minorca), in the Caribbean (Honduras) and in the Gulf of Mexico.** The priority was, above all, to regain control of Florida, where Spain had founded the first stable settlement by Europeans in what is now the U.S. and which it had been deprived of at the negotiating tables. All Spanish moves to retake the territory discovered for Europe by Ponce de Leon were aimed at **conquering the final stretch of the Mississippi**, where the English garrisons (Natchez, Pensacola, Mobile) had been strong since 1763.

When Spain entered the conflict, **Bernardo de Galvez made several military incursions through the left bank of the great river and destroyed the British fortifications.** During his triumphal march he managed to connect with the rebel forces and close agreements with the Indians in the area, although at the end of the



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Bernardo de Galvez (Mariano Salvador Maella, circa 1783-1784).

year, he was stuck in front of Mobile and Pensacola. His movement destroyed Lord Germain's plans, the secretary of State for America of the British Crown, who had been finalizing all the details of **a double offensive to conquer the Mississippi valley from the South, with the conquer of New Orleans from Pensacola**, and from the North with, above all, native fighters. Both fronts would later meet in Natchez, approximately 300 km upstream of New Orleans, thus closing a pincer on the Spaniards.

As Florida was threatened by the torrent from Malaga, the British had no other option than trust all its counterattack to the North, what necessarily meant to capture Saint Louis and all the Spanish posts in Upper Louisiana. **The war**

thus fell in early 1780 on the garrison of the small town, captained by Fernando de Leyba, who suffered the fury of three hundred English soldiers and nine hundred Indian warriors from the forts of Michilimackinac and Detroit, in the Great Lakes region. The British and Canadian leather traders hired the services of these soldiers, mainly Sioux, Chippewa, Menominee, Winnebago Sauk and Fox, under affirmation of getting a good dose of looting. **The conquest of the town was a priority due to its river location as supply for Washington's troops** and its importance as advanced placement of the Spanish Crown.

The British assumed that Saint Louis was an inside position that would offer little resistance, **because no one imagined that a Spanish captain would be that stubborn**. On March 9, De Leyba promised Galvez that he would make the British not forget the name of the villa:

"...although it is an open place with few garrisons, neither Indians nor Englishmen can take possession of the post without costing them dearly..."



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TWO SPARTAN HOURS

De Leyba did not have time to close any alliance with the neighboring tribes and could not count on reinforcements from New Orleans, more than two thousand kilometers away. To make matters worse, his friend Clark, who even had a romantic relationship with one of his relatives, was at that moment involved in a skirmish on the other side of Mississippi **and all the plans to create joint forces with the American major in the neighboring Cahokia never came to be settled on.** He only commanded twenty-nine soldiers and two hundred and eighty-one armed citizens. A great

part of this militia of volunteers was drawn from the inhabitants of Saint Genevieve, a **farming town with a population similar to that of Saint Louis, located 100 kilometers south of this place,** and from the dispersed hunters that populated the Illinois' forests.

Since the declaration of war, **the Ceutan had understood the urgency of his situation and how important the position to protect the rear guard in Florida was** and, in turn, the intersection of the troops of George Washington. At the end, the British would take



Image of the Saint Louis city and the Mississippi's brook (1874).



six weeks to join their forces and leave for Saint Louis, but the lieutenant governor did not know that when he received news about an imminent attack. **Against the clock, he began the construction of the Fort of San Carlos (in honor of Carlos III) at his own risk, using the labor of soldiers and French Creoles,** as well as funds from his own pocket. He wanted to build four stone towers in a hill to the West of the city and then obtaining the benefit provided by height, **but during the thirty-nine days of the building they only had time to finish one tower and part of a second one** before the British arrived eager to recover control of the Mississippi.

The Spanish captain had five bronze cannons brought from an old fort at the mouth of the Missouri River. In the cylindrical tower about ten meters high he placed the cannons (it is assumed that he had more than the five he brought) **and located the majority of his forces behind two trench lines constructed at the ends of the unfinished fortress,** which stretched along all his borders to the South and North of the city, while women and children were confined in the major's house protected by the lieutenant Francisco Cartabona and twenty men. **Not so a warrior woman named Madame Rigauche who, sheathed in her militiaman husband's coat and bearing his weapons, took his place on the front line of battle.**

The British troops led by Emanuel Hesse, a former British army officer originally from Pennsylvania, went down the river and appeared preceded by their Indian warriors in Saint Louis on May 26, 1780. **"To the weapons, to the weapons!" yelled a civilian giving the alert at noon that day.** The first attack was at the North part of the settlement, which seemed defenseless, but the British soon discovered that the position was well fortified. From the tower where De Leyba himself was, the cannons

gave a thunderous welcome to the attackers and both the troops and the civilians showed their **"most courageous spirit, insistently asking to be allowed to make an exit"** from "that huge party of inhumane men", as stated by the Madrid Gazette on February 16 of the following year. The 150 muskets located in the trench

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repulsed **some attacks that, if successful, may have changed the course of American history.** In two hours, the British defeat was forged.

At times, the main concern of the Spanish was to maintain the counterattack of the defenders, who were cheered up by the massacre and also exalted before **the mutilations that their peers were suffering when they were imprisoned by the Indian warriors,** who used to use this strategy to trick



their opponents to take them to open land. The mass of Indians attacked in disorganized lines and, commanded by their leader, they dispersed to regroup, as a flock of birds migrating, and throw themselves again against the enemy sides. However, **the attacks tended to lack depth and obstinacy, because the Indians were reluctant to finish an attack if they did not see a clear victory.** They preferred to set a trap and force lures.

Mutilations were a fundamental part of their strategy of terror. Fernando de Leyba reflected in one of his reports to Gálvez the savage way the natives fought:

“Oh my governor! Your paternal heart would have shed tears if it had been able to see with your own eyes such an emotional spectacle. It was a general affliction and dismay, to see these poor corpses cut to pieces, their entrails (extracted), their limbs, head, arms and legs scattered all over the field, it was a horrible sight, my general in detailing this to you, I find myself very saddened, with great sorrow.”

The British officers did not expect to find any opposition beyond four poorly-armed farmers and, when they had done no more than start, they saw their expedition fray. **All the campaign in the Mississippi valley was untidily dissolved, and the Indian troops headed home on their own.** One of the long-term consequences of this and similar setbacks was the loss of British prestige among the tribes, who were increasingly reluctant to cooperate in operations against the rebels and the Spanish.

Before retreating, the British and their allies scoured the surrounding farms with frustration to achieve any profitability that explained the offensive. **The final toll left 21 dead and**

dozens wounded and captives in Saint Louis, especially at the expense of villagers trapped outside the fortified area. Epidemics, which are always in the rear of places in the history, also caused an undetermined trail of deceased when the shooting was over. A few weeks later, after the British left the region, Fernando de Leyba informed Galvez on June 20 that he probably had malaria (“la maladie”), and that he was leaving Cartabona in charge of Saint Louis due to the expected worsening of the disease. **As some type of modern Cid Campeador, Fernando de Leyba was sick from the beginning of the combats** and, although needing to be transported from one place to another in a sedan chair, he did not abandon the watchtower. The Ceuta native died on June 28 and was buried the same day, in front of the altar of the Parish church of the city by a Capuchin monk named Bernad:

“In 1780, on June 28, I, F. Bernad Capuchin monk and apostolic missionary, priest in Saint Louis, county of Illinois, province of Louisiana, bishopric of Cuba, have buried in this church, right opposite the balustrade on the right, the body of Mr. Fernando de Leyba, infantry captain of the Louisiana battalion, and major in this place, after he received all the sacraments of our Mother, the Saint Church.”

De Leyba's wife died "of melancholy" on the same dates and was also buried in this parish. With more debts and recognitions than hard cash, the daughters of the couple ended up in a convent in Malaga, where they were supported with alms and charity.

Without yet knowing that he was dead, the king granted as an award for “the vigorous defense” made by captain Fernando de Leyba, 45 years old, and the lieutenant Francisco Cartabona, first class lieutenant colonel for the former, and captain for



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Mural of the Saint Louis Battle in the Missouri State Capitol.

the latter. **It was not surprising, the Spanish victory over such a better force was key to maintaining the supply of weapons, ammunitions and other goods for rebels** across the great river to prevent any offensive. First, Galvez in the South and then, De Leyba in the North, the Spanish had effortlessly ruined the plans that the British had designed for years to evacuate Spaniards from the Mississippi.

To answer the question about how such a huge army succumbed against such a small one, the doctor in History Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia states in his recent biography about Galvez **that the key may have been “the cohesion and discipline of the Spanish troops** who knew how to use their scarce artillery, while the assailants just threw themselves to attack completely uncoordinated.”

These “hungry wolves”, as the storyteller Martin Navarro defined the natives, were feared in open land due to the unpredictable attack tactics and due to the horrors they made on their enemies, **but they were unable to take part in an ordered siege against well trained troops that were well sheltered behind a fence.** Far from being an only army, the Indians competed with each other, among tribes and warriors, to attack as a ball of fire the first in small raids, apparently **more concerned about showing their personal bravery than to follow the British commands.** The initial warlike impulse gave way, as the minutes passed, to frustration and then to the demoralization of Indians and redcoats.



BROTHERS IN ARMS

The conflict that led to the independence of the Thirteen Colonies -a country that Spain opposed to recognize until the last moment- ended with a huge success for Carlos III. **One year after the unsuccessful attack on Saint Louis, Galvez attacked the plaza of Pensacola, the control of which set Florida at his feet**, and he kept the British troops busy with his maneuvers when they needed more than ever every man and every ounce of gunpowder in the determining battle of Yorktown, which confirmed the British defeat. In addition, general Juan Manuel Cagigal **conquered the island of New Providence, considered a key position for the British** at the gates of the Thirteen Colonies in May 1782.



New Providence Island, Bahamas.

From few wars did Spain get so much at such a low price. **The progress through Florida by the governor of Louisiana, the spartan resistance of Saint Louis and the subsequent expedition of 140 Spanish soldiers** that ventured from Saint Louis hundreds of kilometers Northeast and arrived in winter to drive the homeland flag in the far British fort in Saint Joseph, on the shores of the Michigan lake, among other noted actions, **established the Spanish Empire in a favorable position in North America** that the

Count of Aranda did not miss in the diplomacy tables in Paris.

Through what was signed in September 1783, **Spain recovered many plazas in Central America, Florida and Menorca**, this last one regained in a fast sudden attack.

The most bittersweet aspect of the war, besides the impossibility of taking Gibraltar, **was to contribute to breathing life into a republican giant hostile to European presence, the future United States**, aiming to the Spanish America's side. Just a few decades later, the influential American historian George Bancroft, with his work "History of the United States of America", **completely removed the contribution of this monarchic and catholic nation to the independence of his country, and even demonized its actions**. The brother in arms, Catholic, monarchical and formal, had become Cain. **Names such as Galvez or De Leyba were just cast into abolition**. Nationally and internationally.

Although Galvez's campaign in Florida has recently been recovered for the general public, it is not the case for the actions developed further North, even in the American Midwest, which remain in a foggy terrain. **When De Leyba died, the French creoles promoted a discredit campaign against him** accusing him of not doing enough to protect the owners of the lands located far from the fort from the Indian robbery. When the local militia tried to **organize a departure to chase the attackers and ejecting the Indian warriors**, De Leyba was **against it due to the fear of the British taking advantage of that to counterattack**. The Ceuta native ordered the population to stay in the fortified area until the combative natives, who he called "barbarians encouraged by the British", finally surrendered.



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The cautious behavior of the Spaniard made them a caricature in a satirical poem entitled «Chanson de L'Année du Coup» («Ballad of the year of the surprise»), **presumably written by the leather trader Jean Baptiste Truteau**. In this text, a courier tells the governor of New Orleans



Statue of Bernardo de Galvez in Washington, D.C.

what happened in Saint Louis and why it was impossible to chase the Indian forces:

*“But, as an order, we were prohibited
To leave the trench where our lines were
hiding.
The governor replies, in the poem, with irony
to the courier:
What did they do then?
Were all men lacking weapons?
What! You did not have the great Leyba with
you! Where was the famous Cartabona?;
Your major! Where was him?”*

The creoles spread the lie that De Leyba had been shooting villagers that did not fulfill his commands about staying in the fort. **Some even said that the English had bribed the Ceuta native to not leave** and that Cartabona was hiding in an attic during all the battles.

It is enough to read the correspondence of the Spanish commanders **to understand how unfair this criticism against the captain was**, whose only concern was the well-being of the settlers in Saint Louis. In a letter he sent Galvez on June 8, **De Leyba explained his efforts to avoid locals to cover the economic effort of the villa's defense:**

“I collected 1000 piaster. I included 400 from my own pocket to lighten the burden of these poor people. My own means do not allow me to make more efforts because I have two daughters. These good people had been consumed and have done the impossible to get the 600 piaster and in addition to around 400 work days.”

The distorted version that the critics gave about De Leyba left a mark with some nineteenth-century historians, **little or not interested at all in outlining the Spanish presence in the area**, the the importance of the



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The most bittersweet aspect of the war, besides the impossibility of taking Gibraltar, was to contribute to breathing life into a republican giant hostile to European presence, the future United States, aiming to the Spanish America's side.

defense of Saint Louis and, like Galvez, his enormous contribution to George Washington's cause became blurred over time. **One of the few exceptions of this neglect is in the City of Saint Louis, where there is an association named Fernando de Leyba / St. Charles. MISSOURI,** which every year commemorates the date of the victory of Saint Louis reading the names of the people that lost their lives in the battle. A little plaque in the city, located in the corner of South Broadway and Walnut Street, marks the place where these historical facts took place:

"Near this place was the San Carlos Fort built in 1780. It was attacked on May 28, 1780 by the British and the Indians, and it was successfully defended by the Spanish garrison commanded by captain Fernando de Leyba. This victory prevented Great Britain from

taking control of the Mississippi valley in the last years of the United States' War of Independence".

Fort San Carlos, whose exact location today would be in some undetermined point in the center of the city, close to the St. Louis Cardinals Baseball Complex, continued being built after De Leyba died. The new lieutenant of the Governor, **Francisco Xavier Cruzat, used large funds sent by the Crown after the attack to complete the fortress with fences, bastions, and walls.** Under his command, the Spanish militias made several counterattacks over the rivers. The fort was demolished in 1818 due to the urban renovation of the city. Several local archaeologists have advocated that **there could be remnants of the fort found under what is now the Cardinals Arena.** The battle is also commemorated in a diorama located in the Missouri State Capitol.

In Ceuta, for its part, there have been many recent efforts to defend the figure of their distinguished countryman. In March 2019, the Castillo del Desnarigado was home to **a homage to the captain made by the Association Fernando de Leyba in Ceuta, the Military History and Culture Center of Ceuta and the General Command Headquarters of Ceuta** to which attended, among others, authorities and groups, beside a representation of units from the Legion and of Regulars, the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution in Spain (NSDAR-Spain), the Association of Sons of the American Revolution in Spain (Spain SAR) and the president of the Autonomous City. **During the act, a monument in the shape of a bronze plaque on a monolith that represents the USA in construction,** with the flag of the Thirteen Colonies emerging from the ground. The writer and police Cristobal Tejon published a novel in 2018 starring the Ceuta native entitled "La llave olvidada" (the forgotten key).



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THE END OF THE SPANISH LOUISIANA

The Spanish history of Louisiana, and with it that of Saint Louis, ended at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The unstoppable progress of the American colonists over the properties of the Spanish Crown **forced Charles IV to create controlled areas, such as the surroundings of Natchez and New Madrid**, where many of these inhabitants were allowed to settle under the obligation of swearing loyalty to Spain. Some noted civil servants, such as the baron of Carondelet, new general governor of the province,

warned about the risk of these actions allowing to conquer the Spanish properties “without drawing the sword.” The lack of interest that the American governors had to solve the imprecise limits of the borders with the Spanish Crown was added to that. They were well aware that time was on their side and that, as finally happened, the policy of the accomplished facts **would end up recognizing most of the territories adjacent to Louisiana and Florida as theirs.**



Map of the Louisiana and Florida coasts (1764).



This happened in 1795, when the Treaty of San Lorenzo was signed in El Escorial where the king renounced to vast territories such as Ohio or the strip of 160 kilometers down the Yazzo river, where the territory was already under republican control. **The most damaged in these concessions were the tribes in the Southeast, allied with Spain by the Treaty of Nogales,** which closed an offensive-defensive agreement to “contribute to protect all the provinces of Louisiana and the two Floridas under the Spanish control” and where the Indian nations named the King of Spain as mediator with the United States to resolve the limits of such nations. **The alliance was scrap of paper when a big part of the tribes fell under the American area.** In the following years, the natives were deprived of their lands and were obliged to move to West, beyond the Mississippi, in what was the second phase of a long exodus.

In 1798, **Spain revoked the right of the United States to travel across the Mississippi river** and to use the port of New Orleans for their trade deals. Due to the temperature rising between the nations, many voices in Madrid were in favor of pushing back borders back to boundaries that were easier to defend, thinking to **focus all the warlike efforts around the rich mineral deposits of Northern New Spain.** The chance to get rid of some territories that would guarantee a war against Washington sooner or later came from that snake charmer named Napoleon Bonaparte.



Portrait of Napoleon (Jacques-Louis David, 1812).



As a compensation for some concessions in the center of Italy, **Charles IV secretly ceded Louisiana to Napoleon, who took less than two years to sell it to the United States** in exchange of a tiny amount that was directly used to defray his wars in Europe. The amount was 15 million dollars, later raised to 23 for interest, and the whole transaction was made behind Spain's back, who for obvious reasons had preferential sale rights. Taking advantage of the fact that the Louisiana borders were never established, **USA used the transfer of power to expand the territory in all directions, including Texas and Western Florida.** In March 1804, the French dramatized the transfer of the territory to the new authorities in a ceremony in Saint Louis.

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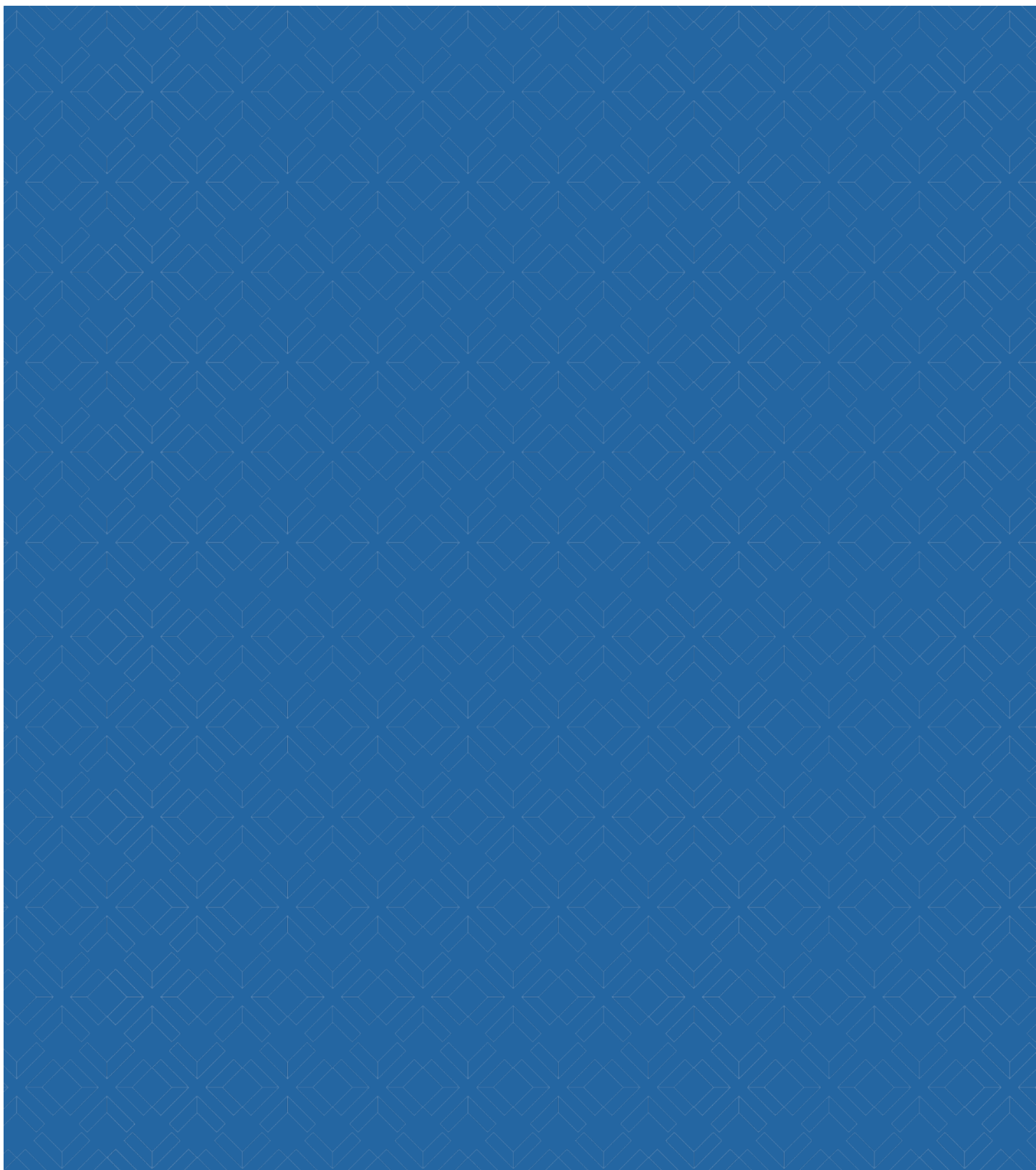


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Cesar Cervera Moreno (Candeleda, Avila, 1988) graduated from the Universidad Complutense and has a master's degree in written journalism by ABC. He has published four books about historical disclosure, "Los Austrias, el Imperio de los Chiflados", "Superhéroes del Imperio", "Los Borbones y sus locuras", edited by **La Esfera de los Libros**, and "Historia de España sin mitos ni tópicos», **Penguin Random House**. He is currently working as an editor in the History section of the **newspaper ABC** and is specialized in cultural content. He collaborates with opinion articles in **El Debate de Hoy**, and he has given several lectures about Isabella the Catholic and other subjects related to the history of the 16th and 17th centuries. He is also the founder and manager of the website **www.unapicaenflandes.es**

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