

U.S. Latino Patriots: From the American Revolution to Afghanistan, An Overview

By Refugio I. Rochin and Lionel Fernandez

Background

The mission of the Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives is to disseminate and advance understanding and knowledge of the contributions of Latinas and Latinos to the culture, society, history, arts, and sciences of the United States (U.S.). Since its inaugural opening on August 10, 1998, the Center has taken an active role in developing knowledge of the accomplishments of Latinas/os, "Latino Patriots" and their role in U.S. military history. Under the direction of Refugio I. Rochin, research has been conducted, data collected, and text prepared at the Smithsonian Institution by Lionel Fernandez, a volunteer at the Center for Latino Initiatives. Jose Alonzo Oliveros, a former fellow at the Center under the auspices of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (FY 2000), initially prepared the groundwork for this project.

This research has explored the feasibility of developing an exhibition at the Smithsonian to document the contributions of Hispanic Americans in military conflicts since the American Revolution where the U.S. has played an active role. This history dates back to the colonial era with the onset of the American Revolution and spans more than 200 years to include contemporary military conflicts. The Smithsonian's collections include more than 140 million objects and archival materials. These include military memorabilia of U.S. war periods. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History is the primary repository of materials that involve the participation of Latinas/os in U.S. military engagements. The National Air and Space Museum has a few relevant objects to add to our knowledge. Several of these wars have placed U.S. Hispanics in the roles of both allies and enemies with Hispanics from other nations.

There are several museums in the U.S. and other countries that trace U.S. involvement in military engagements. However, our research indicates the contribution of Latino patriots is relatively unknown. In addition, there exists a vast body of data, in print, film, and on the internet that is available about the U.S. role in warfare by historians and in personal accounts.

The infamous surprise attack on the people and government of the U.S. on September 11, 2001, underlines the need to honor the contribution of American heroes, both civilian as well as military, who are ready to come to the defense of this great nation and give their lives if necessary. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty! An international war against terrorism has begun against an elusive and deadly enemy, the Al Qaeda network.

The project titled, "U.S. Latino Patriots," was developed by the Center for Latino Initiatives after discussion with Hispanic veterans, current and former colleagues, and educators in Latino Studies. They have all identified the need to recognize and document the military record of Hispanics and/or Latinos in U.S. history, noting the relative absence of this record in state and national museums and archives.

The Context

The history of the U.S. has been marked by periods of coalition warfare, joining with other nations to enlist their aid or alternately, to help pursue common political and other goals with military intervention. In other periods, American foreign policy shifted to a relatively conservative position that the U.S. should avoid foreign domestic entanglements. Coalition warfare, a concept discussed by William J. Coughlin and Theodore C. Mataxis, illustrates precisely how the U.S. made such arrangements in the period from the American Revolution, with the Declaration of Independence from England, to the present day. There were also periods when the U.S. conducted war on its own against another foreign power as it expanded westward to the Pacific Ocean and to its northern and southern borders with Canada and Mexico, respectively. These conflicts involved Spain, England, France and Mexico on this continent.

W. Granville Hough and N.C. Hough have prepared a series of studies on the extensive history of Spanish soldiers who served during the American Revolution and fought against England. They systematically reviewed the record of Spain's patriots in Arizona, California, Louisiana, and Texas. Spain declared war against England on June 21, 1779 and continued operations against England until peace was declared on September 3, 1783.

Hough and Hough observed in a preface to their volume on *Spain's California Patriots in its 1779-1783 War With England During the American Revolution* (Part 2): "Our final thought is the same as that expressed by the historian, Herbert E. Bolton, who suggested that The American Revolution can be considered a rather limited affair between a European country and her colonies on the American east coast, or it can be considered alternately as THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, which freed a whole continent from European domination by 1821, and whose ideas are still being used today."

The Center for Latino Initiatives takes the broad view that to understand the entire contribution of Latino patriots one must look at the complete history of the Spanish and their descendants in this hemisphere, beginning before the Conquest and continuing to the present time.

Definition of "Hispanic" & "Latino"

A continuing ideological battle has existed among members of the Hispanic-American population regarding the use of the term "LATINO" over the often-preferred term, "HISPANIC." The U.S. Census Bureau uses the term "Hispanic" and "Latino" interchangeably to classify the origin of various self-reported Spanish-speaking groups (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South American, or "other") into one ethnic group. Many people from 'Hispanic ethnic groups' prefer to use the term "Latino" for personal, political and social reasons. However, *Hispanic Magazine* recently conducted an analysis based on a survey of 1,200 Latino registered voters, which concluded that the term "Hispanic" was the preferred term in areas with high Hispanic populations. However, this data also indicated that second- and third-generation Hispanic-Americans prefer the term "Hispanic" to "Latino," while first-generation and recent immigrants prefer the term Latino when describing their ethnic background.

A key corollary question is, how has the U.S. Military defined the term "Hispanic?" Accurate documentation of the participation of Hispanic servicemen and women began after the Vietnam War. Did they base their findings on 'self-identified' Hispanics or Hispanics that military officials defined as persons with Spanish surnames? Undoubtedly both were used. This is an important question because it may explain how some patriots of *Hispanic* descent have been overlooked by U.S. military agencies maintaining statistical records.

The ideological debate about how exactly to use the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" to describe people of Spanish origin may never be resolved. However, regardless of the term these patriots have chosen to identify themselves, their remarkable contributions to the military history of this nation has been profound. American military history would undoubtedly have developed differently without the participation of these patriots, many who were natives of the U.S. or from predominantly Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and Spain. Some may consider themselves 'patriots' first above all else, while others may still strongly identify with the term "Latinos." Others may incorporate the two elements in their personal outlook. In any case, they deserve recognition for their heroic deeds in trying to preserve democracy during times of war. It is therefore essential and appropriate to honor our Latino patriots.

The Center for Latino Initiatives' View

The Smithsonian's Center for Latino Initiatives has adopted the term *Latino* as used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. However, the term *Hispanic* is also used in the Center's programs, exhibitions, and educational literature whenever possible. In practice, both terms *Latino* and *Hispanic*, are used interchangeably by the Center. However, for the purposes of this project the Center will use the term *Latino* to denote the inclusion of the non-Spanish cultures of Latin America that have contributed immensely to the development and structure of present-day Latino cultural groups. These groups may include people of Latin American descent whose cultural heritage may be African, Asian, American Indian or indigenous, Middle Eastern and/or European.

We have tried to set the record straight in this analysis. The data may cause unease among some readers and historians who believe the term "Latino" is restrictive to Spanish-speaking, excluding the full range of unique and distinct experiences and histories of various Hispanic/Latino cultural groups. The Center for Latino Initiatives believes strongly that as a national organization, it has a responsibility to represent all U.S. Latinos within the Smithsonian Institution, including those who may have different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Definition of a U.S. Patriot

Although the word, *patriot*, implies a soldier who serves his/her country heroically during military service it can also take other forms. Latino and Latina patriots have also participated as civilians by assisting in U.S. wartime efforts. These have included the contributions by Latina women who worked in munitions factories and Latinos/as in the *Bracero* (foreign farm worker) program who harvested American agricultural products replacing U.S. farmers who joined the armed forces. In addition, U.S. intelligence agencies have documented many examples of valor by Latino patriots in military conflicts.

Throughout the history of the U.S., an American was called a patriot when it was shown that he/she had demonstrated significant valor under fire during a war-related event or period. This "title" was granted to the men or women that had participated in battle to defend the highest principles of U.S. military service. However, patriotism is not limited to acts of heroism during military service, but may also encompass other noteworthy contributions. Many patriots have participated, fought, and died in military conflicts that involved this nation. These same patriots have also fought in battles that determined the outcome of wars between the U.S. and its enemies.

In the Latino community in the U.S., the word patriot has a very precise and significant meaning. In this country that has rarely associated Latinos with the term "patriots," the Latino community has consistently demonstrated that when the U.S. is engaged in a military conflict, they have been the "first ones in and the last ones out." The Latino community has a long history of immigration to this country. Latino sons and daughters have not hesitated to defend their family's honor and have shown their allegiance to this nation through military service. Many have achieved special recognition, including the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor awarded by the U.S. President on behalf of the American government.

The focus of this project is to identify those Latino patriots that have contributed to the military history of the U.S. It is not limited to participants of military service but also to other wartime efforts and may include those Latinos that have participated in critical civilian roles, a group not often recognized for their efforts. These may include patriots that have contributed their services in various war periods in such roles as teachers, farm workers, health providers, and other professionals, while the U.S. was engaged in military conflicts.

Latino patriots have also been instrumental in helping to determine the outcome of major battles between the U.S. and its enemies. Without their contributions, the military as well as the political, economic, and cultural history of the U.S. might very well have been different. The significant contributions of Latinos have not been properly recognized and thus the American public needs to know more about their sacrifices and contributions to ensure the freedom of this nation.

Recognized Military Conflicts

Recognized military conflicts include several events where the U.S. Congress never officially declared war, as required by the Constitution. However, such "police actions" also involved military engagements with countries that resulted in the deaths and capture of many Hispanic-American soldiers.

Recognized conflicts include:

American Revolution

War of 1812

U.S.-Mexican War

Civil War

Indian War Campaigns

Interim 1866-1870

1871 Korean Campaign

Interim 1871-1898

Spanish-American War

Philippine Insurrection

China Relief Expedition (Boxer Rebellion)

Interim 1901-1911

Action Against Outlaws—Philippines 1911

Mexican Campaign (Vera Cruz) 1914

Haiti 1915

Interim 1915-16

Dominican Campaign

World War I

Haiti Campaign 1919-1920

Second Nicaraguan Campaign

Interim 1920-1940

World War II

Korean War

Vietnam

Somalia

Operation Desert Shield/Storm (Iraq)

The Historical Record

This project will focus on the contributions of Latino patriots in military conflicts and their significance to their outcomes. Unfortunately, for many years the U.S. government and the U.S. military did not keep separate records of the participation of Hispanic-American soldiers. There were areas in the U.S. still under the control of the Spanish and Mexican governments. More recently, around the Korean War (early 1950s), the U.S. Department of Defense asked new recruits to self-identify to help maintain accurate records of Hispanic-American soldiers in military service. Puerto Rican units served with distinction, in this war. However, we know that some Latinos were overlooked, as in the recent case of Rocky Versace (Vietnam War) who was formerly thought to be an Italian-American. Prior to this period, Hispanic-American soldiers were categorized along with white Americans in the same racial classification. Accurate data was obtained for Hispanics in the armed forces after WWII with creation of the Department of Defense (former War Department).

The time periods that will be discussed reflect the limited information that is available due to limited systematic documentation. A significant amount of work completed in this project is based on the U.S. military's own efforts to document Hispanic-American participation in all the armed services branches. The early time periods, such as the American Revolution, only identify the exploits of individual Hispanic soldiers who gained fame because of political and other appointments and/or courageous acts of valor that elevated them to regional or national recognition by the American people. In subsequent time periods, there is more information available about Hispanic-American participation, especially about individual Hispanic regiments and acts of valor by Hispanic Medal of Honor recipients. As this study progresses, information will be disclosed that documents the extraordinary contribution that Latinos and Latinas, have made to the defense of the U.S.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution, (1775-1782), a.k.a. the War of Independence, was initially a civil war against the British Empire. Later, France (1778), Spain (1779), and the Netherlands (1780), joined our cause with a common enemy, creating an international war. Sea power was important to both sides, providing flexibility in the conduct of the war.

Spain had earlier established an empire that confirmed it was a world power to be reckoned with. Spain had colonies in almost every section of North America, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. England had defeated Spain in the Seven Years War (1754-1763) and subsequently Spain was forced to relinquish its colony in Florida to England. However, Hispanics in the U.S. were eager to assist the American colonists in their struggle against England, even though Spain was not, as yet, officially engaged in the conflict. Spain's military contribution to the early development of the U.S. began the process of demonstrating Hispanic's loyalty, commitment and patriotism.

A very important Hispanic figure during the American colonists' war against Great Britain was Governor and General Bernardo de Galvez. He was the Spanish governor of the Louisiana territories during the time of the American Revolution and was instrumental in assisting then General George Washington to fight the British soldiers who were advancing into the southwestern part of the U.S. Governor de Galvez helped the revolutionists by blockading vital British ships although Spain had not declared war with Britain. In addition, from 1775-1777, Governor de Galvez provided rations and weapons to the Continental Army. In 1777, he arranged safe passage for James Willing, an American agent of the Continental Congress, who led a successful campaign along the Mississippi river harassing British shipping, plantation owners, and military outposts.

It was not until Spain had officially declared war with Great Britain in 1779 that de Galvez organized a militia of Native- Americans, freed African-Americans and his own Spanish regular soldiers to attack British held forts at Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Natchez, Mississippi. A year later, he engaged the British at Mobile, Alabama and a year after that at Pensacola, in western Florida. In each case, de Galvez was able to force the British from their entrenchments and freed these cities. His statue resides in Washington, D.C.

General de Galvez also trained and mentored other Hispanics who would one day contribute significantly to the defense of the U.S. One of de Galvez's officers was Francisco de Miranda, who was born in Caracas, Venezuela on March 28, 1750. Subsequently, de Miranda fought in the siege and surrender of Pensacola, and

later in the Spanish capture of the Bahamas, which he negotiated as the official representative of the governor of Cuba. While in Cuba, de Miranda played a role in obtaining supplies for the French Admiral de Grasse who then sailed to the Chesapeake Bay to assist the Americans to capture Yorktown, Virginia. As a result of these contributions to the American Revolution, statues in Washington, DC and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a park in Pensacola, Florida, and a commuter bus in Chicago, Illinois were dedicated in honor of de Miranda who was also instrumental in helping Venezuela gain its independence from Spain.

Another Hispanic patriot was Captain Jorge Farragut, who came to the U.S. from the Spanish island of Minorca to help the American colonists fight the British during the American Revolutionary War. He is the father of another famous Latino patriot, David Farragut.

The contributions of Hispanics such as Bernardo de Galvez, Jorge Farragut, and Francisco de Miranda were not uncommon. Hispanic persons participated in the Revolutionary War. In addition to the significant contributions of Bernardo de Galvez, there were Hispanic women who participated in the American Revolution. In 1781, the French and American forces were about to abandon their siege of Yorktown, Virginia for lack of funds. Cuban women collected money and jewelry so the French Expedition could continue the siege. The financial support from these Hispanic women redefined the term *patriots*. While not soldiers in combat, their contribution to the war effort was significant.

War of 1812

Anglo-American relations deteriorated in the years following the American Revolution as the British attacked American shipping as trade expanded. The war of 1812-1815 was sparked by the sinking of U.S. ships and by a U.S. Congress determined to punish the British. Expansionist sentiments prompted attacks into Canada that were firmly repelled. Naval and land engagements took place against a superior British military. The war with England ended in a stalemate with a penniless and divided U.S., revealing a nation militarily unprepared. Captain Jorge Farragut also fought in the War of 1812 as a member of the U.S. Navy. Further research is needed to identify the Latino patriot's role in this conflict.

U.S.-Mexican War

The U.S. annexed Texas from Mexico in 1845, an event complicated by a border dispute. Mexico retaliated and the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848, began. Many Hispanics living on the Texas frontier opposed the Mexican government's treatment of Texans. They fought in crucial battles such as the Battle of the Alamo. In this historic battle, a force of 8,000 Mexican soldiers killed 183 Texans. U.S. casualties included seven Mexicans: Juan Abamillo, Juan Antonio Badillo, Carlos Espalier, Gregorio Esparza, Antonio Fuentes, Calba Fugua, and Jose Maria Guerrero. A survivor was Lieutenant Colonel Juan Nepomucene Seguin, who was sent for reinforcements. After the Battle of the Alamo, he fought in the Battles of San Antonio and San Jacinto. He later was mayor of San Antonio but fled to Mexico in 1842 due to Anglo/Texan hostilities. He later returned to Texas, but was forced to return to Mexico where he lived until his death in 1890.

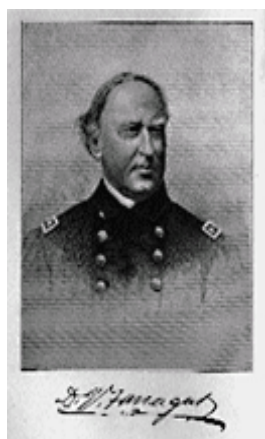
During the U.S.-Mexican War, Hispanic Americans such as Juan Seguin devoted their lives to help spread democracy into the new territories acquired by the U.S. Those Hispanics who fought on the U.S. side performed gallantly because they had a clear sense of belonging to the U.S. cause and a strong loyalty to their adopted country. Their actions provide an example for Hispanics to guide and inspire them to serve in the U.S. armed forces in the future.

U.S. Civil War

The 1860 U.S. Census reported there were approximately 27,500 Mexican-Americans living in the U.S. When the Civil War (1861 - 1865) broke out between the states in 1861, the Mexican-American community was suddenly divided. At the outset, approximately 2,550 Mexican-Americans joined Confederate military units and another 1,000 joined the Union forces. In all, as many as 9,900 Mexican-Americans fought during the war. Most volunteers served in integrated regular army or volunteer units. Others served in Mexican units with their own officers. Of the more than 40,000 books and pamphlets written about the U.S. Civil War, only one, *Vaqueros in Blue and Gray*, has been published about the role of Mexican-Americans in the Civil War. These all-Mexican units tended to be volunteer militia units.

In 1863, the U.S. Government authorized the military commander in California to raise four companies of native Mexican-American Californians in order to take advantage of their "extraordinary horsemanship." As a result, the First Battalion of Native Cavalry was created with Major Salvador Vallejo in command. Some 469 Mexican-Americans served in the four companies of the First Battalion of Native Cavalry. These men were stationed at locations throughout the states of California and Arizona. They guarded supply trains, chased bandits, fought Confederate raiders, and helped to defeat a Confederate invasion of New Mexico.

In the state of New Mexico, the Second Regiment of New Mexico volunteers was commanded by Colonel Miguel E. Pino. In addition, six other independent militia companies were formed. Most unit members were Mexican-Americans, as were their commanders. They served in roles similar to the California units, primarily as border guards and fought in numerous small engagements. There were an estimated 4,000 Mexican-Americans among the New Mexico volunteers. Patriots like Lt. Colonel Chavez also commanded a New Mexican militia unit and General Stanilus Montoya commanded the Socorro County, New Mexico militia. Another non-Texan unit with a number of Spanish-speaking soldiers was the 55th New York militia, "The Garde Lafayette."



Admiral David G. Farragut. Courtesy: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

In the State of Texas, the Union raised 12 companies of Mexican-American cavalry, consolidated into the First Regiment of Texas Cavalry (Union). Most of the officers were non-Hispanic, although several Mexican Texans (Tejanos) served as captains, such as George Trevino, Clemente Zapata, Cesario Falcon, and Jose Maria Martines and lieutenants, such as Ramon Garcia Falcon, Antonio Abad Dias, Santos Cadena and Cecilio Vela.

These Latino patriots contributed in many ways to the preservation of the Union during the U.S. Civil War. Perhaps the most famous Hispanic patriot during this period was Admiral David G. Farragut. He was the first Admiral of the U.S. Navy (1866) a rank awarded to him by the U.S. Congress after his famous victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864. He was instrumental in achieving victory for Union Naval Forces against the Confederate Navy during some of its bloodiest conflicts. The rallying cry, "Damn the torpedoes-full speed ahead!" is a heroic charge made by Admiral David G. Farragut, to his officers, and seamen.



Loretta J. Vskasuez, alias Harry Buford. Loretta J. Velasquez, The Woman in Battle: Davis Library, UNC, Chapel Hill

