

OUR AMERICAN HISTORY

LA HISTORIA DE NUESTRA AMÉRICA



Official documents on the role of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans in the American Revolutionary War are housed in several manuscript collections, including the Library of Congress in Washington, DC and the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla, Spain.

There are numerous documents that discuss the role of the Spanish and Hispanic Americans in the Battle of Yorktown. This final battle of the Revolutionary War was financed through a hurried collection of silver and gold from the people of Havana, Cuba, which was brought to Yorktown by the French war fleet. A copy of one of these documents is below.

This document is from the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla, Spain, and was signed on August 17, 1781 by Juan Manuel de Cagigal, a Cuban in the Spanish armed forces who fought with Bernardo de Galv ez in the 1781 Battle of Pensacola. The letter is addressed to Jose de Galv ez.

This letter discusses the arrival of the French warship, the *Agriette*, in Havana. The *Agriette* was captained by a French officer named Traverse, and Francisco Saavedra de Sangronis was also onboard. Saavedra was in Santo Domingo meeting with French Admiral Fran ois-Joseph Paul De Grasse to discuss the assistance from the Spanish to the French and the North Americans. The French immediately needed 500,000 pesos for the war in North America. The official Spanish Treasury in Havana did not have the needed funds, and the citizens of Havana were asked to help. The citizens responded quickly to the urgent request, supplying the money in less than 24 hours.

In a reference that appears in both the Domingo de Monte Collection in the Manuscript Division in the Library of Congress and in the AGI, an official notice or “Real Orden” from King Carlos III was promulgated on September 5, 1781. This document notes the great satisfaction by the King with the assistance rendered by the citizens, “los vecinos”, in providing 500,000 pesos in “the briefest time” to the Count de Grasse and the French squadron under his command.¹ In later testimony recorded in the Audiencia de Santo Domingo on December 7, 1781 the leading Spanish naval officer in the region, General Jos  Solano, also discussed the King’s review of the incident and the response of the citizens of Havana, noting “with great pleasure the gains in the North, the effects of the aid with the triumphs are well known.”²

¹ Jos  de G lvez, Havana, Cuba, February 16, 1782, The Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Domingo de Monte Collection, Cuba, 182-86, B11-45, box 4, fol. 2

² Philip W. Bonsal to Stephen Bonsal, Madrid, Spain, December 29, 1946, The Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, “The Papers of Stephen Bonsal”, enclosure to letter, 14. references AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, leg. 1234, no. 175 Copia del testimonio legalizado de las sesiones del Cabildo de la Habana, December 7, 1781.

N. 61

Ex^{to}mo. Señor.

El Gov^r de la Nav^a participa haber entrado en ag^{ta} Puert^o el 15. del actual una Frag^{ta} Francesa despachada p^r el Conde de Grasse en solicitud del empréstito de 500 D^{rs}; y habiendosele entregado esta cantidad se hizo a la vela la noche del 16^{to} día. —

Muy Señor mio: Habiendo da-
do fondo en este Puerto el 15. del
actual la Fragata de Guerra de su
Mag^d Christ^{ma} la Aigrete su
Capitan Mr de Fraverse viniendo
en ella el Capⁿ Dⁿ Francisco Saabe-
dra, y explicandome este ser su ob-
jeto el que se despachase con la ma-
yor brevedad con quinientos mil D^{rs}
y que para ello era conveniente
pasase Yo un oficio al Intend^{te}
de Exército, sin embargo de faltarme
me orⁿ del Rey sobre el particu-
lar

se dispuso el de que es copia lo
adjunta N.º 1º, que comprhen-
de la respuesta del Intendente
por la qual reconocerá V.E. que
alas 24. horas se habia hecho la
entrega de los referidos quinientos
mil p.^s al citado M.^r Fraxerse.

Para coleccionar esta Cantidad,
mediante lo exhausto de caudales
que está la Tesoreria, ha sido preci-
so previniese a los Cuerpos que
tienen algun fondo, lo entregasen
al Tesorero, y que el Intendente
recurriese a los Vecinos, quienes se
han portado con liberalidad para
poder llenar esta urgencia del Ser-
vicio, como no dudo informará a

V.E. con mayor estencion este
Ministro.

Efectuado todo diu anoche vela
la Fragata contextando Yo al
Conde de Grase à el oficio que me es-
cribio en los terminos qual se ser-
vira V.E. reconocer del Documento
N.º 2. que incluyo.

Participo à V.E. para su devidi-
da noticia.

N.º Señor que à V.E. lo
m. d. S. que desee Havana 17 de Ag.º
de 1781.

Exmo. Sr.

Amor. V. E. de V. M.

aten. de V. M.

Manuel de Cagigal

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Xmo. Sr. D.º Joseph de Cabrez

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