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Local Perspective

The Spaniard who helped win the Revolutionary War has a new statue in D.C.



Ambassador Santiago Cabanas, left, greets Jim Torgerson, chief executive of Avangrid, at the unveiling last month of a statue of Bernardo de Gálvez outside the Spanish Embassy. (John Kelly/The Washington Post)



By **John Kelly**

Columnist

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There's a new statue outside the Spanish Embassy in Washington and though it honors someone who died more than 230 years ago, it seems oddly relevant today.

I'd never heard of **Bernardo de Gálvez**, [the Spanish general](#) who was honored last month at the statue's dedication, but I had heard of Galveston, the Texas city that's named after him. And I'd heard of the 18th-century conflict in which Gálvez played a pivotal role, a little something called the American Revolution.

Gálvez (1746-1786) was a military officer who served as the governor of Louisiana when that vast territory was in Spanish hands. When the upstart American colonists decided to throw off the yoke of British oppression, Gálvez was only too happy to help, first providing ammunition and supplies, and then mobilizing 7,500 men to attack British interests in what today are Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. He also laid siege to Pensacola, Fla.

By turfing the British out, Gálvez denied them a port in the Gulf of Mexico.

Spain's interests weren't entirely pure. What's that saying? The enemy of my enemy is my friend? The Spanish figured helping the rebels was a way to stick it to the English, whom they'd never forgiven for sinking their armada. I didn't notice any British diplomats at the statue's unveiling. (Spain is still sore about Gibraltar.)

"People don't understand how much Spain contributed to American independence," said **Marion Startz Reeb**, who was at the dedication with her mother, **Mary Anthony Startz**. Marion is descended from Spanish patriots who aided in the War of Independence. They were in town for a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



The statue of the Spanish general — by Madrid artist Salvador Amaya — is from a 2018 exhibit called "Recovered Memories: Spain and the Support for the American Revolution." (John Kelly/The Washington Post)

Why do Spain's contributions so often get overlooked?

"Most history books were written by East Coasters," said Mary Anthony.

These East Coast historians tended to focus on the contributions of French figures such as the **Marquis de Lafayette** and **Count Rochambeau**.

We may not prize Gálvez, but **George Washington** did. He felt the aid the Spanish general provided was a deciding factor in winning the Revolutionary War. In 2014, [Congress granted U.S. citizenship](#) to Gálvez, one of only eight foreigners so honored.

Inscribed on the base of the 32-inch statue is Gálvez's motto: "Yo solo," which means "I alone." It refers to how Gálvez steered his warship into Pensacola Bay to attack the British fort there. The rest of the fleet was reluctant to attack, so Gálvez got things started by himself.

Washington already had a statue of Gálvez, a handsome equestrian sculpture not far from the Kennedy Center. The new statue — by Madrid artist **Salvador Amaya** — is from a 2018 exhibit called "Recovered Memories: Spain and the Support for the American Revolution." That exhibit was sponsored by Spanish energy giant Iberdrola and its U.S. subsidiary Avangrid.

The new statue [joins others in town of figures I knew were Spanish](#) — like **Queen Isabella I**, outside the Organization of American States — and those I didn't. Spain claims as a son naval hero **David Farragut**. The admiral who shouted "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" at the Battle of Mobile Bay was born to a father from the Spanish island of Minorca and an American mother.

After Spain's ambassador, **Santiago Cabanas**, unveiled the statue, the assembled crowd went into the embassy for some tasty Spanish food and drink.

I couldn't help but think about the irony of a Hispanic person being honored seven blocks from the White House, where the president seemed not to be too keen on Hispanic people.

The last waltz

Eileen Carson Schatz died July 10, the morning after the [big bluegrass tribute concert](#) at the Birchmere in her honor. Though stricken with pancreatic cancer, she'd attended the show. On Monday she was laid to rest in Bestgate Memorial Gardens in Annapolis.

Eileen was the founder of Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble, and the funeral she planned with her husband, **Mark Schatz**, was as exuberantly choreographed as any of her shows.

There was a plain pine casket with a hand-hewn oak cross atop it. As the hearse moved toward the grave it was followed by a singing and dancing crowd.

"We had a big band of fiddle players, banjos and guitars, and a big bass on a wheel," Mark said.

A bench will mark Eileen's grave, the back of it engraved with eight bars of a song Mark wrote for her — "Eileen's Waltz" — and the words: "Oh, how the songs and tunes did fill our hearts and lift our feet."

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