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Larrie D. Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016. xxv + 429 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$30.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781101875247; \$18.00 US (pb). ISBN 9781101910306; \$14.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781101875254.

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In June 2018, the Sons of the American Revolution will hold their Ninth Annual Conference at The Johns Hopkins University to reassess the role of Spain during the revolutionary period. They have noted that while historians have long and firmly established the involvement of France in the independence of the United States, the participation of its Spanish ally has been relatively understudied. This peculiarity is confirmed when perusing the extensive bibliography of *Brothers at Arms*, which reveals that in the past half-century, barely a dozen books have been published on the topic. Yet, more importantly, it shows that the roles of France and Spain have so far been examined separately. This approach, as Larrie Ferreiro rightly demonstrates, makes little sense given the alliances between the two nations in the eighteenth century.

In 1733 and 1743, the French and Spanish Bourbons signed two Family Compacts, by which the monarchs promised mutual aid in the event of war, notably against the British, whom they feared were tipping the European balance of power in their favor. Louis XV and Carlos III renewed the alliance in 1761, when France and Great Britain were fighting each other in the French and Indian War in North America (known as the Seven Years' War in Europe). The conflict ended in a conclusive British victory and the 1763 Treaty of Paris, which dealt heavy territorial losses to France and Spain. Yet, while the British had defeated the Bourbons, they had certainly not discouraged them. The French and Spanish monarchs quickly devised a strategy of *revanche*, which translated into the plan of an amphibious assault on the British isle. Preparations for the proposed attack meant reforming and integrating the French and Spanish navies to create an effective Bourbon fleet. Hence, by the time of the American War of Independence, the two Bourbon courts not only enjoyed a strong motivation but also an improved naval cooperation. For Ferreiro, the three eighteenth-century Franco-Spanish alliances necessarily call for a comprehensive study of the role of foreign aid in the Revolutionary War. By examining the financial and military support of France and Spain to the thirteen colonies, Ferreiro has contributed significantly to the history of the American Revolution. Yet, regrettably, the absence of all historiographical contextualization in the book does little to highlight the author's achievement of deftly weaving together French and Spanish narratives and perspectives.

Ferreiro argues that the Franco-Spanish desire for revenge coincided in time and space with North American colonists' call for foreign help. His reading of the Declaration of Independence as a "Declaration That We Depend on France (and Spain, Too)" (p. xvi) explains the subtitle. *American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It* clearly summarizes the central idea of the author's thesis: had it not been for the foreigners who fought next to the Continentals, the American cause would not have triumphed. George Washington's soldiers and militiamen lacked gunpowder, the

essential ingredient of war, in addition to artillery and guns. The troops were not disciplined, not properly trained, and more often than not were paid in arrears, causing much discontent in the ranks. Likewise, the colonists lacked a fleet or even much of a naval tradition to allow them to engage effectively at sea.

Nevertheless, to suggest that the North American colonists succeeded thanks largely to the men of France and Spain risks dismissing the well-documented weaknesses of the British, and readers would do well to read Ferreiro's book together with Andrew O'Shaughnessy's *The Men Who Lost America* (2013).^[1] O'Shaughnessy explains that not only did the British make logistical and strategic mistakes in the colonies, but they also encountered organizational, administrative, financial, and political problems in Britain, all of which contributed to the loss of America. Moreover, an overstretched British army and navy employed in a global war against France, Spain, and Holland constrained George III's government to reconsider its imperial priorities. Keeping the thirteen colonies in the fold of the empire ceased to be one of them.

Ferreiro's argument is also an invitation to ponder the outcome of the American Revolutionary War without the support of France and Spain. "What if" questions can be tricky and potentially misleading, but they can sometimes also be helpful and enlightening. Let us fast-forward then to the early nineteenth century, when Spain's American empire collapsed. In 1808, Napoleon forced the Spanish king to abdicate and replaced him with his brother Joseph Bonaparte. The Spanish population did not recognize *el rey intruso* (the intruding king) and fought back against the French occupying troops in the name of Fernando VII, *el rey deseado* (the longed-for king). In the American colonies, former Spanish subjects of the deposed monarch fought to fill the power vacuum the conflict in Spain left behind. The confrontation between the local Spanish authorities and their loyalist allies and the revolutionaries would eventually expand into a full-scale war, which lasted until 1825. Unlike their North American counterparts, however, Spanish Americans received very little foreign support, and it required some fifteen years of bloody warfare in a much larger territory and more difficult terrain to achieve independence. An exhausted Spain withdrew to its Caribbean islands never to set foot again in its former continental empire. Victorious Spanish Americans, albeit worn out and divided, had succeeded in dispossessing the Bourbon monarch of practically all of his three-centuries-old dominions.

In contrast, it took North American revolutionaries just over five years to defeat the British and their loyalist comrades. The shorter American War of Independence allowed a moderately depleted British army to withdraw to its forts on the upper western border of the United States, where it threateningly remained until the 1790s, and to retain Canada and the British Caribbean for much longer. It would take the United States another military and naval confrontation with Britain (the War of 1812) to push the British peril definitively away. Thus, did the men of France and Spain really save the American independence? Ultimately, we could ask who saved whom, who saved what, what was saved. It could obviously be argued that comparing the North and Spanish American revolutionary wars is flawed given the differing military and naval forces Great Britain and Spain had at hand to deploy. Yet, there is also the undeniable fact that the colonists in both North and South found themselves in an equally unfavorable position and at a clear disadvantage vis-à-vis the imperial forces when the independence wars broke out, and both urgently needed outside military help.

That said, this book is largely about warfare. It focuses mainly on the land and sea battles, strategies and tactics, economic and financial support, and the organization of the campaigns and the men who waged the war. Indeed, by placing a wide array of men at the heart of the work, Ferreiro has produced an extremely detailed narrative of their actions. His work encompasses not only generals and admirals, but also agents, observers, spies, businessmen, arms traders, engineers, and artillerymen. The author organizes the protagonists in groups, and names the chapters accordingly: the merchants, ministers, soldiers, and sailors (chapters two, three, four, and five, respectively). He explains how they used their extensive trade networks to procure arms, why and how they sent military aid through the Caribbean

islands, and how they mounted combined land-water operations. The other chapters present the development of the conflict, from “The Road to War” (chapter one) to “The Road to Peace” (chapter eight), and the final chapter evaluates the legacy of the war. In sum, Ferreiro has allied military with economic, political, and diplomatic history in a combined narrative of topical and chronological chapters.

Finally, Ferreiro argues that from the British perspective, the American War of Independence was a “minor civil war in a distant colony” that turned into “a full-scale world war against its two mightiest adversaries” (p. 115). And here lies the author’s other main idea: the independence of the United States occurred within the framework of international war. It is difficult, however, to argue that it could have been otherwise. All of the eighteenth-century wars, from the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), to the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739-1748), and the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), pitched the European monarchies against each other. In the wake of each one of these conflicts, suspicion and wariness among the European powers lingered, which made keeping the balance of power all the more important. That the European crises should have crossed the Atlantic to their American colonies and then returned to the Old World, was no surprise, and even to be expected. Indeed, this phenomenon would continue until the end of the Age of Revolutions. Anthony MacFarlane accurately demonstrates this argument in *War and Independence in Spanish America* (2014) when he sets the Spanish-American movements for independence in the broader context of world war.[2] As Atlantic history has clearly shown over the last thirty years, trans-national, trans-imperial, and trans-colonial connections were such that a more geographically restricted and more “local/national” perspective is no longer persuasive.

All in all, Larrie Ferreiro’s *Brothers at Arms* is a thorough study. The author carried out extensive research in archives in France, Spain, Great Britain and the United States, and he has given us an elegantly written work on a rather overlooked topic. While not necessarily as groundbreaking in its arguments as its publisher might claim, it is certainly groundbreaking in scope.

NOTES

[1] Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)

[2] Anthony MacFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America* (New York: Routledge, 2014)

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