

## Season 1, Episode 6: The Spanish Flag

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Show Transcript

### Why the Flag? The Spanish Flag: Four Kingdoms of the *Rojigualda*

Welcome back to another episode of Why the Flag, the show that explores the stories behind the flags, and how these symbols impact our world, our histories, and ourselves. I'm Simon Mullin.

On the last episode, we discussed the Nordic Cross of Scandinavia, from its descent from heaven on the battlefield in 1219 to its slow and steady conversion of the Viking pagans of Norway, Finland, and Estonia, and then finally making its way into Sweden, a country who held onto its 4,000-year-old pre-Christian beliefs until those were finally squashed in the 13th Century. The Nordic Cross flags of Norway, Finland, and Iceland were designed on the one hand to show their devotion and ancestry to the original Dannebrog flag of King Valdemar of Denmark, and on the other hand, choosing their national colors to express their deep desire for independence, freedom from foreign control and intervention, and the right to self-determination.

However, as we explored in the last episode, the ancient pagan practices continued in Sweden throughout the Christian years, possibly influencing their first three-crowned flag, and even seeping into the customs and traditions we see today. Spending time in Sweden as a kid, I remember learning about the origins of the Christmas tree as a pagan totem, one from which animals and humans were hung to rot as a tribute to the gods – and it wasn't until my research on the last episode where it came full circle for me: the Christmas tree is thought to be a direct descendant of the trees in Gamla Uppsala, where for thousands of years, humans and animals were executed and hung as sacrifices to Thor, Oden, and Frey. As we theorized in the last episode, it is an homage to these three gods that the first Swedish flag was established – the three golden crowns on a blue ground, ultimately transforming into the blue and yellow Nordic Cross flags of 1906.

On today's episode, we deviate a bit from the theme of national mythologies and how those legends are depicted on a nation's flag – a theme we covered extensively on the episodes about the flags of Wales and the Nordics – and instead, we'll focus on the complex history of one of Europe's newest flags. The flag we'll talk about today is less than 40 years old, but it carries the ancient symbols of four medieval kingdoms that many of its citizens identify with and pledge allegiance to today – even to the detriment of this country's national unity. I'm speaking of course about the *Rojigualda*, the red and gold flag of the Kingdom of Spain.

The unique red-gold-red banner makes the Spanish flag one of the most easily recognizable flags in Europe – but the mysterious coat of arms on the center gold banner is hard to decipher by the untrained eye. And it's this the coat of arms that tells the complicated story of the Spanish nation's founding. The images on the flag tell a history that begins with the Muslim

conquest of Hispania's Visigoth Kingdom, with those symbols then coming to life during the Christian *Reconquista* and the collapse of Islamic rule, then its consolidation as centuries-old monarchies, and then finally, it's unification as a modern nation-state.

By studying the images of the Spanish flag, you quickly realize that this is not a single national flag at all – but an amalgamation of the flags of four medieval kingdoms, along with one French dynasty, and even the symbols of foreign nations of which Spain has no control – and they're all wrapped together into a single banner that we call the Spanish flag.

So, on today's episode, we'll tell the story of the ever-changing flag of Spain, and discuss how each small piece of this complex banner came together to create the flag of the Spanish Kingdom we see today. We'll ask, what do the gold and red banners really mean, why are they unique – and where do they come from? How has this flag evolved from the time of the inquisitor Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to the First and Second Spanish Republics to the Spanish Civil War and the Fascist takeover by Francisco Franco – and finally, the eventual liberation of Spain in late 1975? And what does the coat of arms tell us about the violent, bloody, and beautiful history of the modern Spanish state? As always, we'll ask why the flag? And today, why the flag of Spain?

This is the story of the Islamic conquest of Spain, its eventual collapse, and the rise of the kingdoms of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and Navarre; the territory of Granada and the Straits of Gibraltar; and of course, the French House of Bourbon, whose fleur de lis flies at the center of the Spanish coat of arms. This is a story of marriage and madness, of men and of saints, of brutal war and of fragile peace, and the rise and fall of fascism in Europe – and the hopes of a young nation yearning to be free.

So, when we come back from the break, we'll travel back to the 8th Century, when the Iberian Peninsula was at the edge of the known world, and the Umayyad Caliphate that ruled a Muslim Spain for nearly 800 years. We'll be right back after this.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

The Umayyad conquest of the Iberian Peninsula began on April 30, 711 AD, when Tariq ibn Ziyad and his 12,000 Muslim warriors crossed the Straits of Gibraltar from Morocco and pushed their way north through Spain. By 717 AD, nearly the entire region of modern-day Spain and Portugal were swept up into Muslim control, with the Muslims halting their expansion at the Pyrenees Mountains just south of France. This conquest resulted in the quick and total destruction of King Roderic's Visigoth Kingdom in Spain – a Romanized kingdom that ruled the entire Iberian Peninsula since the fall of the Roman Empire in 427 AD – and led to the establishment of the Emirate of Cordoba, marking the western-most reach of Muslim rule in Europe.

What's most interesting to me about the Umayyad conquest is that it was never supposed to be a conquest in the first place, but actually, a large raiding party sent to fill the coffers of the Muslim warlords in the region. This theory is supported by the fact that the Muslim army that invaded in 711 was constructed mainly of Berbers (or Moors), an ethnic tribe native to north and west Africa, who for years raided southern Spain and clashed with Visigoth King Roderic and his army near Gibraltar, and who they themselves had just recently come under the control of the Umayyad Caliphate. So, when the Muslim forces landed this time around as they had done for years, King Roderic's army was there, ready to squabble with what they thought was a petty raiding party. But this time, the Visigoths were decimated. At the Battle of Guadalete in 712, King Roderic himself was killed, and the Muslims were quickly reinforced with more soldiers by a man named Musa bin Nusayr, the general and governor of the Muslim provinces of north Africa. With no king and no army, and with tens of thousands of Muslim warriors streaming into Spain, the Visigoth population was left leaderless and disorganized, opening up the region for a swift and decisive conquest, from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Pyrenees Mountains, and from the Balearic Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. For the next half millennia, this region would be known not as Hispania or Spain – but Al-Andalus, the Arabic word for the Iberian Peninsula.

It's interesting to note that for the Middle Ages, the Moors were relatively tolerant of their native subjects' religious practices – Christians and Jews were allowed to worship freely. And in fact, the Jewish population thrived under Islam, and the era of Al-Andalus is also known as the Golden Age of Jewish Culture in Spain. However, Christians and Jews were subject to a special tax called the *jizya*, which provided them the autonomy to practice their religions – but at the same time, established a repressive expression of their subordination. For the Jews, it was worth the fee not to have the Christians breathing down their necks.

And speaking of the Christians, Al-Andalus was at near-constant war with Christian Europe and the old Christian Visigoths in northern Spain ever since its inception. Breaking out in earnest in Northern Spain in the 11th Century, the *Reconquista* – or the reconquering of the Visigoth land – was largely a series of Church-sponsored holy wars and crusades that would span over 700 years, flooding Spain with Christian knights from around Europe to push the Umayyad Caliphate back into Northern Africa. The first battle of the *Reconquista* was fought early on in 718 with a Christian victory at the Battle of Covadonga, and in 721, the Muslims were turned back from their conquest into Europe at the Battle of Toulouse in Southern France. And by the 10th and 11th Centuries, civil wars within the Cordoba Caliphate – the century-old Muslim caliphate of Al-Andalus – weakened Islamic control in the region, and from the chaos would rise four major Christian kingdom states in northern Spain: the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, León, and Navarre, with Portugal establishing a separate and independent kingdom in the 1140s.

I'm going to pause here a moment because, as I mentioned at the start of the show, these ancient kingdoms' flags are four of the nine symbols found on the Spanish flag today. If you can, quickly pull up a picture of the Spanish flag so that you can follow along. Starting in the top left of the coat arms, you'll find the kingdom of Castile, with its golden castle on a red ground; to the right, you'll see Leon, with the royal purple crowned lion – a symbol that survived from the

old military standards carried by legions in Roman Hispania; on the bottom left is Aragon, from which the Catalanian flag would emerge as these two states combined in 1137, with its bands of red and gold stripes; and to its right is Navarre, with their golden cross and chains linked together on a blood-red background. Don't worry – we'll save the other symbols, like the Pillars of Hercules, the Plus Ultra, the flower of Grenada, the fleur de lis, and crown for later on in the episode.

But first, let's finish up a quick history of the Reconquista. Skipping forward to 1147, Pope Eugenius III in Rome and the Catholic powers of Europe launched the Second Crusade to the Holy Land. The primary objective of this holy war was to recapture the territory of Edessa in modern-day Syria, a center of commerce and culture in Byzantium, which had fallen from Christian hands in 1144 to the Muslim Seljuk Turks. Despite being led by the German king Conrad III and the French king Louis VII – and an invading force of more than 60,000 soldiers rallied to the cross from all corners of Europe – the Crusaders were unable to take control of Edessa from the Muslims. This was an immense triumph for the Muslims on the Eastern Front. However, a secondary objective of the Crusade was to attack the Muslims in Al-Andalus and reclaim the land for the Christian kingdoms of Portugal, Leon, and Castille, as well as the Catalanian County of Barcelona. Spain was much closer to home and much easier to get to for the European Crusaders, and the Christians finally saw a major victory as Lisbon fell to King Alfonso Henriques of Portugal on October 24, 1147, after a textbook 4-month siege of the coastal city. Historians argue that this battle turned the tide in favor of the Christian kingdoms of Spain, further consolidating Christian territories and reigniting their hope of pushing the Moors back across the Straits of Gibraltar into North Africa. And for the next one hundred years, the Spanish kingdoms would claim victory after victory against the Muslims, that by the mid-13th Century, only Grenada in the south would remain under Muslim rule – and in exchange for their continued existence, they would be forced to pay taxes to the Christian kingdoms of Spain. The tables had turned, and Muslim rule in Spain would see its total collapse under the infamous monarchy of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in the late 15th Century. With god clearly on the side of the Christians in Spain, the region would witness horrific acts of retribution, violence, and genocide against religious minorities in the centuries to follow. And we'll discuss that and much more when we come back from this quick break. We'll be right back.

BREAK

Where we left off, the Spanish kingdoms of the north had pushed the border of Al-Andalus all the way to the southernmost region of Granada. And by all accounts, the Reconquista was a stunning success after almost 700 years of Muslim control. The brutal conflict was not only fueled by a devotion to Christian supremacy over the infidels – but also by the promise of gold in victory, something the Muslim rulers had plenty of after centuries of back-breaking gold mining in West Africa. So, historians often ask, was it the allegiance to god, or the desire for gold, that pushed the Europeans toward Reconquista? Well, actually a bit of both. The Christian kingdoms of the Middle Ages were not nearly as powerful as they would one day become, so along with preaching to the faithful to take up arms, the wars that made up the Reconquista

were often privately funded – and even paid for retroactively with gold pillaged from the Muslims after victory. And many of the soldiers they paid off were ruffian mercenaries from around the continent. With these mercenaries and religious zealots came extreme violence in their victories, including the enslavement of the defeated Moors and the forced conversions and public executions of Muslims and Jews, leading to Medieval romantic ideas of Christian militarism, conquest, and honor through blood. And when the Reconquista was completed, the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus conveniently gave Spain a glorious new crusade in which to take part.

On October 18, 1469 – 23 years before Columbus set sail to the Americas – Queen Isabella I of Castile and Leon married her second cousin, King Ferdinand II of Aragon, uniting the three kingdoms under a single monarchy, and kicking off the consolidation of a unified Spain for the first time since Visigoth rule. Their marriage resulted in a brand-new flag for their unified realm – a complex banner that incorporated the existing flags of these kingdoms: a tapestry of four gold castles for Castile; four crowned lions for Leon; and four gold and red banners for the Kingdom of Aragon.

In 1480, under this unity flag, Isabella and Ferdinand established what would become known as the Spanish Inquisition – the forced conversion, expulsion, torture, and mass execution of Jews, Muslims, and those converts believed to be practicing non-Catholic religions in Spain and within its territories – an inquisition of extreme violence and oppression that would spread from the Spanish Netherlands to the Americas, and end only in 1834. On January 2, 1492, at the height of the Inquisition’s fervor, Granada would fall to the Catholic Monarchs and be annexed by the Kingdom of Castile. After more than 700 years of holy war against Muslim rule, the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula was complete. Next was to be the brutal conquest, subjugation, and enslavement of the New World, and the establishment of the most powerful nation of post-Medieval Europe – the Spanish Empire.

In 1496, Isabella and Ferdinand’s daughter, Joanna, married the Duke of Burgundy, a man named Philip Habsburg, who – if you recognize the name – came from the powerful Austrian House of Habsburg. And when Queen Isabella died eight years later in 1504, Joanna was elevated to her mother’s position as Queen of Castile, ruling side-by-side with her father, King Ferdinand, the king of Aragon. But unfortunately for Queen Joanna, her rule wouldn’t last long, as Ferdinand would not lose his power over Castile to a girl – even if it was his own young daughter. And what happens next is a wild ride through the rites of succession, which was unfortunately typical of Renaissance Europe. So, get this: in 1506, Joanna is declared a “mad woman” by the court and was imprisoned by her husband and father, so that Philip Habsburg could be made king of Castile. And to secure the Habsburg line and legitimize his family’s claim to Spain in the eyes of the world, Philip would introduce a new royal flag, the Cruz de San Andrés, commonly known as the Cross of Burgundy – a red, saw-tooth shaped cross of St. Andrew on a white ground, bestowed in honor of his mother who came from Burgundy. This particular cross shape is known as a saltire, and you can find it on the flag of Scotland, and even on state flags of Alabama and Florida today, which pay homage to the Spanish colonial period when the Cross of Burgundy was used over those territories.

To King Ferdinand's delight – and just after the elevation of the Cross of Burgundy – Philip Habsburg conveniently died on September 25, 1506, in the Spanish city of Burgos, the old capital of Castile. This left his second child and first-born son, the six-year-old Charles V, the next in line for the throne. Because of Charles's young age and with his mother, Joanna, in prison, his grandfather Ferdinand would step up to the plate as Regent of Castile, King of Aragon, and the undisputed ruler of Spain – and he took the French King Louis XII's niece, Germana de Foix, as his new wife. He then tried to secure his own line as the rightful rulers of Castile by having a child with Germana, but, luckily for the young Charles V, their son John died shortly after childbirth.

Then, in order to consolidate even more power over the Iberian Peninsula, King Ferdinand invaded the Basque Kingdom of Navarre in 1512, annexing the kingdom for Castile in 1515, and eventually adopting their flag – the golden cross and chains – into the Spanish coat of arms you see on the flag today. However, the inquisitor King Ferdinand would die without an heir on January 23, 1516, and in 1517, Charles Habsburg, the orphan son of Philip and Joana, would be coronated Charles V, king of Castile, king of Aragon, ruler of the Spanish Empire spanning from western Europe to virtually the entire western hemisphere.

Charles V would kick off nearly 200 years of Habsburg dynasty rule in Spain – and flying his father's Cross of Burgundy as the flag of the Spanish Empire. Charles is also credited with introducing the motto "Plus Ultra" – which means "further beyond," into the Spanish realm, which would be the motto of Spain for the next 500 years. Now, if you look closely at the Spanish flag today, you'll see a red banner hugging the Pillars of Hercules with the words "Plus Ultra" emblazoned in gold. So, you might be wondering, what is the significance of Charles's motto? And why are the Pillars of Hercules on the Spanish flag? Well, legend has it that the mythical Hercules built two pillars at the Straits of Gibraltar – the edge of the known world at the time – with the motto, "Ne Plus Ultra," meaning "Nothing Further Beyond." But with the recent "discovery" and conquest of the New World by Spain in the 15th and 16th Centuries, Charles cheekily removed the word "Ne" from the old motto, claiming, "Plus Ultra," there is in fact *further beyond*, and what lays beyond belongs solely to the Spanish Empire. And up until his death in 1556, it would be hard to argue that he was incorrect.

When we come back from the break, we're going to discuss the end of Habsburg rule in Spain at the turn of the 18th Century, the retirement of the saw-toothed Cross of Burgundy, and the rise of the French House of Bourbon, with their golden fleur de lis on a blue ground, as the new rulers – and the new symbol – of the Spanish Empire. We'll be right back after this.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

The year 1700 was one of the most bizarre in Spanish history. After 16 generations of Habsburg inbreeding to keep the bloodline pure, the tragically ugly and intellectually stunted Charles II

was coronated King of Spain at the ripe age of four, with his mother ruling as regent until he was 15. At no fault of his own and due to the genetic deformities from incest, poor Charles's jaw – known as the Habsburg jaw – was so elongated that he could not chew his own food; his tongue was so bulbous he could barely speak; his body was so weak that he was not allowed to walk until fully grown; his mind so infirm because his family refused to educate him – he was totally illiterate and completely dependent on those around him to survive. His first wife from an arranged marriage was his second niece, the French Marie Louise of Orleans, but according to the French ambassador in 1679, "The Catholic King is so ugly as to cause fear, and he looks ill." In other words, his own wife was too afraid to even look at him, and she died in 1689 without leaving an heir. Weeks after her death, Charles would betroth Marie-Anne of Neubourg, King Louis XIV's daughter, who, encouragingly, had 22 living siblings. Surely this fertile family line would lead to an heir. But, again, due to his impotence and infertility caused by incest, he would never have a son. And in the year 1700, at the young age of 38, Charles V died – some would say mercifully – and without an heir, officially ending Habsburg rule in Spain. The Cross of Burgundy – the two-century-old flag of the Spanish Empire that flew from Madrid to Mobile, Alabama – would fall shortly after.

But what made 1700 so bizarre is that Charles V wrote in his will that, if he was to die without an heir, the Bourbon royal Philip of Anjou – the grandson of Louis XIV – should succeed him on the throne. This did not sit well with the Charles's relative, the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I – who would claim the throne for his own Habsburg son, Archduke Carl VI. Nor did it make England very happy to see their historic foe, France, extend their realm into the Iberian Peninsula, and indeed, the Americas. So right after his Charles's death, almost all of Western Europe would join in on the bloody 13-year conflict known as the War of Spanish Succession, which would change the geographic and political power structure of Europe forever.

But first, a new Bourbon dynasty in power meant that a new Spanish flag and naval ensign was in order. Known as the Bourbonic Flag, this complex banner included the castle flag of Castile, the lion of Leon, the stripes of Aragon and Catalonia, and most distinctly, the three golden fleur de lis of France on a blue shield displayed prominently at the center. And under this new flag, Philip of Anjou would find himself immediately at war in 1701 with the Holy Roman Empire, the Dutch Republic, Great Britain, Prussia, Portugal, and Savoy, as well as with Habsburg loyalists within his own territorial borders.

The war did not start well for the new Spanish monarch. Prince Eugene of Savoy first seized Spanish territories in southern Italy, and England swiftly took control of the Spanish Netherlands. And in 1704, the French boldly counter-attacked with a march on Vienna to knock the Habsburg Austrian's and the Holy Roman Empire out of the war, but John Churchill, the English Duke of Marlborough, caught wind of the surprise attack and met the attacking French and Bavarian armies at the Battle of Blenheim in southern Bavaria. It was an overwhelming defeat for the French and their allies. Vienna was saved, and Bavaria, not Austria, was knocked out of the war – dealing a crucial blow against the Bourbon dynasty. Shortly after, French and Spanish fleets were crushed off the coast of Spain, and the English seized Gibraltar – a territory they still hold to this day. And to make matters worse, as Philip saw his support diminish within

Spain, insurgents loyal to the old Habsburg family loyalists rose up across the country – particularly in Catalonia – first capturing Barcelona and then seizing Madrid, although they were not able to hold onto the capital for too long. The War of Spanish Succession even spilled over into the Americas, where French, Spanish, and their allied Native American armies conducted brutal raids on English positions, leading the English to counter-attack against the Appalachee tribes in 1704, slaughtering them to the man in what is today Tallahassee, Florida. The war was long and bloody, but no one could have predicted what would happen next.

In 1705, Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I died, leaving the crown to his son Joseph – who died soon thereafter. This would then elevate his second son, Archduke Carl VI – whom he had claimed was the rightful heir to Spain as the justification for this war – as the new Holy Roman Emperor. Handing the Spanish Empire to the Holy Roman Empire was not in the cards for their British and Prussian allies. Then, in 1712, after a series of royal deaths in France, the Spanish king Philip, who was fifth in line to the French throne, all of a sudden became next in line behind King Louis' four-year-old grandson. This means that by 1712, on the one hand, you have Philip in position to control not only the Spanish Empire but inherit the French crown as well. And on the other hand, you have the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor claiming the massive Spanish Empire as his own. Now, this idea of a global superpower run by either the hated Bourbon Dynasty or the much-too-powerful Habsburg Dynasty was a terrifying prospect to the British and their allies, who decided not to risk either option and come to the table for peace in 1714. And to secure the peace and his crown, Philip renounced his claim to the French throne and was internationally recognized as the king of Spain and its territories. Also, in this treaty, the British would keep Gibraltar and gain a monopoly on the African slave trade in Spanish America, and Austria would take Spanish territories in Italy. But looking at this at a higher level, this war would introduce a real balance of powers in Europe. The peace treaty of Utrecht would read, “because of the great danger which threatened the liberty and safety of all Europe, from the too-close conjunction of the kingdoms of Spain and France... the same person should never become King of both kingdoms” – a statement which many historians see as a key milestone in the evolution of the modern nation-state. And back in Spain, the Spanish state would maintain its complex flag, with a coat of arms incorporating all the ancient totems of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Granada, and Catalonia – and of course, with the Bourbon fleur de lis at its center. This flag – which I'll leave for you to look at in show notes – would remain the flag of the Spanish Empire until a dramatic change to the flag was made by a succeeding king.

King Philip V, the Bourbon monarch who secured his dynasty's survival in Spain after a disastrous 14-year war, and who brought the French fleur de lis to his new empire, died at age 62 on July 9, 1746. He was succeeded by his son, Ferdinand VI, but King Ferdinand would die childless in 1759, leaving the throne of the Spanish Empire in the hands of his half-brother – the ambitious Charles III.

In 1760, Charles III immediately went to task designing a new flag for the Spanish Empire, adding even more design elements into an already overcrowded coat of arms. Now, the mid-18th Century was the height of the Age of Sail, and it became tragically apparent – after several incidents of friendly fire – that even at a short distance, it was virtually impossible to tell the



difference between the various red-and-white European naval ensigns sailing around at the time. It became even more difficult when these nations were at war, and you didn't know who you were shooting at – or who was shooting at you. So, Charles III tasked his naval minister to design a new flag for the Spanish navy that would solve this problem once and for all. And after being presented a half-dozen options, on May 28, 1785, Charles would choose for his navy a simple flag of red-gold-and-red horizontal banners, with the old symbols of Castile and Leon united under a jeweled crown. Thus, the *Rojigualda* – the first iteration of the modern Spanish you know today – was born.

When we come back from this short break, we'll talk about the elevation of the *Rojigualda* from the symbol of the navy to the first flag of the Spanish nation. But before we get there, we'll quickly discuss Napoleon's conquest of Spain, the Bourbon's restoration, and the rise of republicanism in the Iberian Peninsula. We'll be right back after this.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

The turn of the 19th Century was not a great time to be a member of the Bourbon family in Western Europe. If you recall the story of the Tricolour flag on episode 2, the French Republican's sent the Bourbon royals to the guillotine, ending their dynastic hold on France for decades. But even though their relatives to the north were overthrown, Bourbon Spain remained close allies with the new French government, and in 1807, Spain was actively supporting Napoleon's war of conquest against their neighbors in Portugal, as Spain and France agreed to divide Portugal between them. But the true purpose of Napoleon's Portuguese Campaign was to defeat his greatest enemy, Britain, through an economic stranglehold by blocking off continental Europe from trading with Britain – and Portugal was standing in his way as one of Britain's largest European trading partners. With his victory in the War of the Fourth Coalition in late 1806 and early 1807, Napoleon controlled nearly the entire European continent – but he was unable to defeat the British at sea or invade the island. So, he would beat them with the most powerful weapon in his arsenal – an economic embargo. Portugal would be swiftly defeated by the French and Spanish alliance, and the Portuguese royal family would flee with their lives to their colony in Brazil.

However, even though his Portuguese Campaign was aided by his Spanish allies, there were factions within the Spanish royal court who opposed French hegemony and the destruction of Britain and even tried to persuade the Spanish king to abandon his alliance with the war-hungry Napoleon. They also blamed Napoleon for the destruction of the Spanish navy and alienation from their colonies during these never-ending wars – and in turn, Napoleon would accuse the Spanish of not pulling their weight. Napoleon got lucky when, at the height of this French-Spanish tension, a political struggle within in the Spanish crown would pit King Charles IV against his son, Prince Ferdinand VII, over the king's appointment of one Manuel de Godoy as Prime Minister – whom the prince hated because he believed he was too pro-French, and whom Napoleon hated, conversely, for being too pro-British. And after a popular uprising

against the king in March 1808 in favor of his son, Charles would abdicate the throne to Ferdinand VII. In this, Napoleon saw an incredible opportunity, and he invited both father and son to Bayonne to mediate their dispute – but to their surprise, it was an elaborate trap. Napoleon would arrest them both on arrival, and force them to recognize his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as the new king of Spain.

Before news of their arrest would make it back to Spain, and under the guise of “just passing through” to send additional forces to Portugal, more than 100,000 of Napoleon’s troops marched deep into Spain under Tricolour banners and marching bands, completely untouched by the confused Spanish army – with some Spanish commanders even welcoming French soldiers into their camps and fortresses. This would be a catastrophic mistake. French soldiers would quickly turn on the Spaniards and capture all major centers of Spain as a swift and brutal occupation force, and Joseph I would take the throne as king.

Now, I want to get back to the story of the flag, so I’m just going to quickly cover what happened next. A popular uprising would erupt in Madrid against the French occupiers in May 1808, kicking off a long, expensive, and brutal conflict known as the Peninsular War – also referred to today as Napoleon’s Vietnam. Coining the term “guerilla fighters,” Portuguese and Spanish resistance would rise up against the French across the Iberian Peninsula, and open their doors to the British who would join them on land to bring the fight to Napoleon’s army. To make a very long story very short, land in Portugal and Spain would be conquered one day and liberated the next, dragging on as a costly back-and-forth war of attrition, until in 1812, Napoleon was driven out of Russia, reigniting another war against the French on the continent, and stretching his forces far too thin to fight on all fronts. The massive British forces in Portugal would ultimately push the French out of Spain, the Bourbon King Ferdinand VII would return as king of Spain, and in 1814, along with the Austrians, Prussians, Swedes, and the European Coalition, they would invade France itself, capture Paris, and forced Napoleon to abdicate as Emperor. In short, the Spanish guerillas, along with the Portuguese and British, did the impossible – they defeated the greatest European land empire since Rome, liberated Europe, and put Spain in Spanish control once and for all. But the fight for what kind of Spanish nation that would be was just heating up.

Some of the most effective resistance fighters against the French occupation were the liberals, who adopted a much more, well, liberal constitution for Spain, which granted many more freedoms for the people. At the same time, the constitution undermined the power of the monarchy – a monarchy, who, at the time of the constitution, was imprisoned in France. When King Ferdinand VII was reinstated by popular support in 1813, he turned on the very liberals who fought for his return and rejected the constitution. As just quick as it had disappeared, Bourbon absolutism was back to rule Spain.

In the 1820s, the independence wars in South America had crippled the Spanish economy, and a mutiny within the military forced the king to adopt a more liberal constitution. But after only three years of constitutional monarchy, the now monarchist French would invade Spain with little resistance to put Ferdinand VII back in personal rule. Political tensions would once again

grip the country when the traditional royalists in the Basque regions of Valencia and Catalonia opposed the king's centralization of the Spanish government and his stripping of their autonomy – and it further enraged them when he changed the laws of succession to allow a woman, his daughter, Isabella, to succeed him on the throne, instead of his brother Charles, whom the conservative royalists supported. To add fuel to growing fire, Ferdinand then exiled his brother to Portugal and allied with the liberal factions within Spain by giving them key governmental positions, much to the dismay of the conservatives. When King Ferdinand VII died in 1833, leaving the throne to his infant daughter and putting her mother, Maria Christina, in as regent, civil war would break out between the self-proclaimed Carlists – the conservative royalists – and the liberal monarchy controlled by a Queen. The Carlists would forever reject the royal flag of Spain and instead fight under the old Habsburg banner – the saw-toothed red and white Cross of Burgundy, which flew during the golden age of the Spanish Empire for more than 250 years.

The Carlist's decision to revive of the Cross of Burgundy flag did more than just proclaim their conservative absolutism; it galvanized the Basque countryside by reminding them of an imagined and idealized era of Spanish stability and control at a time of immense political turmoil and oppression. In my eyes, it's no different than when Henry VII placed the ancient red dragon of Wales on his battle flag to rile up Welsh support for his war against Richard III during the Wars of the Roses, which would elevate him to King of England in 1485. Ten years after the Carlists revival of the Cross of Burgundy flag, and under the reactionary reign of Queen Isabella II, the monarchy would cede to popular support and finally adopt the *Rojigualda* naval flag, the unmistakable red-gold-red banner with the symbols of Castile and Leon under a gold and red crown, as the official flag of the Kingdom of Spain in 1843. So, along with their guns, knives, and cannons, both sides would use the stories and inflated histories of their flags as weapons in the fight for the hearts and minds of the Spanish people.

From 1833 to 1876, Spain was gripped by near-constant civil war – known today as the Carlist Wars – exacerbated by the loss of Spanish colonial territories and economic disaster at home. Although the impassioned Carlists under their Cross of Burgundy flag would lose the war and never see the return of traditional conservatism, they would witness the overthrow of Queen Isabella II – not by their hand, but by a conspiracy of liberals and republicans who were exhausted by her inefficient and politically inconsistent government. At the end of what is called the Glorious Revolution of 1868, Queen Isabella was deposed and exiled to France. And as she abdicated the throne in 1870, the liberal provisional government decided to reinstate the monarchy under a new dynasty – the House of Savoy – choosing Amedeo Ferdinando Maria, the Italian Duke of Aosta and a descendent of the Spanish King Philip II, as their new king. But like all too many new kings in Spanish history, his reign would not last long. Almost immediately after his ascension to the throne, his chief political supporter, the old Captain General of Puerto Rico and Prime Minister of Spain, Juan Prim, was assassinated, and the nation was thrown into chaos as violent clashes between monarchists, constitutionalists, Carlists, and republicans erupted across Spain. At the same time, he was dealing with uprisings against Spanish authority in both Puerto Rico and Cuba – nations that would adopt revolutionary national flags with a triangle and star, inspiring Catalan nationalists to adopt the same symbol

on their flag. With the ceaseless violence and the growing republican fervor against the monarchical rule – as well as multiple and credible threats against his life – King Amadeo I called it quits and abdicated the throne in disgust on February 11, 1873. He went before the *Cortez*, which is the Spanish Parliament, to proclaim that Spain was “ungovernable” and fled with his family back to Italy, where he lived out the rest of his short life as Duke of Aosta, dying seven years later at the young age of 44.

So, at 10 o’clock at night, on February 11 – the day of his abdication – the Spanish monarchy was abolished, and for the first time in its history, Spain was declared a free and independent republic. Emilio Castelar, who would become Spain’s first democratically elected republican president, took the floor of Parliament to announce:

“Traditional monarchy died with Ferdinand VII; parliamentary monarchy with the flight of Isabella II; democratic monarchy with the abdication of don Amadeo of Savoy; nobody has finished it, it has died on its own; nobody brings the Republic, save all circumstances, a cabal of society, nature, and history. Sirs, let us greet it like the sun rising with its own strength on the sky of our nation.”

One of the first acts of the First Spanish Republic was the adoption of a national flag to represent the new era of a democratic Spain. So, they removed the gold and red crown that sat atop the castle of Castile and the lion of Leon from the flag to show that it was not a monarchy that held these ancient lands together, but the people of Spain, united in common purpose as a modern and progressive democracy.

When we come back from the break, we’ll witness the fall of the First Spanish Republic, the return of the Bourbon dynasty, the rise of the Second Spanish Republic with a new flag for a democratic Spain – and finally, the nationalist takeover by Francisco Franco following the tragic Spanish Civil War in 1939. We’ll be right back after this.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

On December 29, 1874, Spain’s first experiment with democracy was usurped by a military coup led by the Spanish military officer Martinez Campos. Eager to return to their traditional kingdom, the military coup – called the *pronunciamiento* – restored the Bourbon monarchy and installed Alfonso XII, the exiled Isabella’s son, as the new king of Spain, and placed the crown back to its rightful place on the Spanish flag. Spain’s new constitutional monarchy with Alfonso XII as head of state was actually a pretty successful government for the first few years. Political stability was maintained by rotating power between the moderate Liberal and Conservative parties in Parliament – a practice called *Turismo* – but it was not a democracy – they silenced the voices of the republicans and socialists, the Carlists and Catalan nationalists, and anyone critical of the monarchy. Alfonso XII’s reign was cut short after only 11 years, dying three days

before his 28th birthday and leaving the throne to his unborn son, and installing his Austrian wife, Maria Christina, as Queen Regent.

By the time Alfonso XIII was enthroned on his 16th birthday on May 17, 1902, Spain had just faced a massive military defeat by the United States, losing Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War of 1898. And although the new king's government began successfully by reigning over a time of economic recovery and modernization in Spain, he led a failed war to conquer Morocco, and his well-trained Spanish army was devastated by a smaller, ill-equipped, out-gunned yet tenacious Moroccan force – known as the Republic of Rif – who fought under a red flag with a green Islamic Crescent Moon and Star at its center. This loss in 1922 – along with the suppression of unionists, socialists, nationalists, and all dissenting parties – led to widespread outrage and violent revolt back home in Spain. To no one's surprise, instead of engaging with his people to quell their discontent, King Alfonso XIII backed a conservative military coup by the infamous Captain General Miguel Primo de Rivera – whose personal motto was “Country, Religion, Monarchy” – and named him prime minister. Primo de Rivera staunchly believed that all of Spain's problems were caused by parliamentary government, so with the backing of the king, he suspended the constitution, dissolved the Parliament, abolished all political parties besides his own Spanish Patriotic Union party, and ruled with absolute power as the dictator of Spain from 1923 until massive popular opposition forced him to resign in 1930. The same forces who pushed out Primo de Rivera would turn their anger toward King Alfonso, who fled for Rome on April 14, 1931 – the birthday of the Second Spanish Republic.

This time around, the Spaniards weren't content with just removing the crown from the old royal flag. The red and gold colors of the *Rojigualda* would not do. These colors represented the hated Bourbon dynasty and the last seven years of failed dictatorship – and the new Spanish Republic deserved a flag of hope, of freedom, and of republican democratic values. On April 27, 1931, the Republican Tricolor flag was adopted, and on May 6 it was presented to the nation with the words:

“The national uprising against tyranny, victorious since April 14, has hoisted a flag that is invested by means of the feelings of the people with the double representation of the hope of freedom and of its irreversible triumph.”

This new tricolor – purposefully reminiscent of the Tricolour flag of the French Revolution – was designed with three equal, horizontal bands of red, yellow, and dark purple; red and yellow to represent the heritage of Aragon and Catalonia, and *morado*, or purple, for Castile and Leon. The purple stripe was meant as a badge of republicanism, symbolizing that all Spaniards were to be represented in this new free and independent state. It was also a traditional color of Catholicism, so that may have played a role in that color's addition. They also adopted a new republican coat of arms to be placed at the center of the tricolor flag, which is very similar to the one we see today: a quartered shield with the ancient symbols of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Navarre, and Granada, between two Pillars of Hercules to represent Gibraltar with the national motto, “Plus Ultra” – further beyond – and capped by a mural, not a royal, crown. This crown

was a medieval crown to represent their ancient heritage from the kingdoms of Castile, Leon, Navarre, Aragon, and Granada, rejecting the old crown of the Bourbon dynasty. And even though Gibraltar has been in British hands since 1704, it is thought that the addition of the Pillars of Hercules to the flag is a gesture to proclaim that all of Spain should belong to the Spanish – and acts a middle finger, well, two middle fingers – to the imperialism of the powerful British Empire. You got to give them credit – as a young, idealistic, radical republican nation, the Spaniards were putting their money where their mouth was by adding this anti-imperialist message squarely on their national flag.

But republican idealism in Spain couldn't outweigh the reactionary, nationalist momentum catapulting across Europe and around the world at the height of the Great Depression. By the mid-1920s, Benito Mussolini's fascists had an iron grip on Italy. By 1933, Adolph Hitler's Nazi party had taken control of Germany. And even across the ocean in the United States, fascist American figureheads like Louisiana governor Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin were gaining followers, and groups like The Silver Legion of America and the German-American Bund were rising to prominence. Spain was not immune to this nationalist disease. On February 16, 1936, the labor unions, liberals, and socialists would band together to democratically elect a leftist Popular Front government – and in response, on July 17, a well-planned, right-wing military uprising broke out in garrison towns across Spain, capturing territory in Spanish Morocco, Basque provinces, and Catalonia, sparking the three-year Spanish Civil War between the nationalist and fascist rebel factions on the right, and the republicans on the left.

The republicans were the loyalists in the civil war, so their flag was the tricolor red-gold-purple flag of the Second Spanish Republic, which was at the time the national flag of Spain. The nationalists and fascists, who rejected republicanism, removed the purple band from their flag, reverting to the traditionalist *Rojigualda*, or red-gold-red flag, of the old monarchy.

From the early stages of the war, any opposition or even suspected dissent within the territories controlled by both sides was dealt with swiftly – and with extreme violence and brutal persecution that can only be described as war crimes. While the Republicans, or *Los Republicanos*, engaged in this regrettable violence mainly at the outbreak of the war to restore the rule of law, violent persecution against perceived enemies by the Nationalists – the *Los Nacionalistas* – was a deliberate, top-down policy of terror. While the rest of the world moved closer to a total clash of civilizations between the ideologies of republican democracy, communism, and fascism, the Spanish Civil War could be seen in one sense as a proxy war between these world views, unleashing the heated passions of all sides and leading to a level of Spaniard-on-Spaniard violence not seen since the horrors of The Inquisition.

Within the first few months of the war, it was clear that neither side was strong enough to achieve a quick victory, so they turned to outside help for support of their cause. The Republicans received arms and men from the Soviet Union, Mexico, and France, as well as an influx of idealistic foreign fighters from around the world – including the famous Abraham Lincoln Battalion from the United States. Notable authors like George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway would join on the side of the Republicans in Spain and Orwell's accounts

in *Homage to Catalonia* and Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* would draw international attention to the crisis in Spain. On the other side, the Nationalists would receive tanks, planes, and troops from Hitler's Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Fascist Italy, and autocratic Portugal. Some historians will argue that this was the biggest proxy war of the 20th Century – a trial run for the world war to come.

The International Brigades on the side of the loyalists would design their battle flags on the red-gold-purple of Spanish Second Republic, but instead of the coat of arms at its center, they would place their own insignia. One popular design was a red, three-pointed star at the center to represent the Popular Front, a coalition of leftist parties, including the socialists, communists, Marxists, republicans, and leftist republicans. The volunteers from all over the world would either carry the star or switch it out with a symbol of the anti-fascist ideology they fought for, be it a communist hammer-and-sickle or an anarchist motif. Other flags were used as well, including the black-and-red flag of the National Confederation of Labour, or CNT, and the black flag of the Iberian Anarchist Federation.

While the Nationalists primarily fought under the monarchist *Rojigualda*, they had a number of flags to represent their factions as well. For example, The Falangists, who were the Spanish fascist party at the time, their flag was a red-black-red banner with a symbol at the center called the Yoke and the Arrows. The Yoke and Arrows symbol – El Yugo y de las Flechas in Spanish – is one that dates back to the late 15th Century to Isabella and Ferdinand and the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Leon. It's important to note that the contemporary spelling of Isabella in Spanish is spelled with a Y, like Yugo, and Ferdinand with an F, like Flechas – thus, you get the Yugo y de las Flechas, the Yoke and Arrows, a flag aligning itself with the idealized past of a powerful and absolutist Spanish Empire under Isabella and Ferdinand. You won't be surprised that the deeply conservative Carlists would emerge once again on the side of the rebels, and they would fight under the saw-toothed red Cross of Burgundy on a white background – the old flag of the Habsburgs and the Spanish Empire, and the flag of rebellion during the Carlist Wars, which devastated Spain for much of the 19th Century.

But on April 1, 1939, after nearly three years of war, the Second Spanish Republic fell when the last Republican forces in the city of Alicante would surrender to Captain-General Francisco Franco, the leader of the Nationalist army and head of the new Spanish state. The era of Spanish fascism had begun – and the new flag of a right-wing, nationalist Spain was raised above the capital in Madrid.

We'll be right back.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

Francisco Franco was nine years old when the young King Alfonso XIII came to power in 1902. He was born into a deeply royalist family with strong ties to the Spanish navy. In fact, his family

has been naval officers for six generations, until the Spanish-American War decimated the Spanish navy, and led to the loss of most of Spain's overseas territories. So, in 1907, he bucked family tradition by enlisting in the Infantry Academy at the age of 14, and graduated at age 17 as a second lieutenant. A smart and formidable soldier, Franco moved so quickly through the ranks that by the time he was 23, he was a captain, leading a command of colonial shock troops in Spanish Morocco. He would first gain notoriety during a battle in El Biutz, on the Moroccan Mediterranean coast, when he survived a normally fatal gunshot wound to his lower abdomen, puncturing his liver and leaving him infertile with only one testicle. Therefore, ot's widely believed that his daughter's true father was his brother, Ramón. Anyway, the colonial Moroccan troops would give Franco the Arabic nickname of "baraka," much like the Hebrew "bracha," meaning, meaning "God's blessing" for his incredible luck surviving his wounds. And for Franco, his good fortunes were just beginning.

In 1926, at the age of 33, Franco became the youngest and most famous brigadier general in the Spanish Army and the youngest in all of Europe. So nearly ten years later, on October 1, 1939 – three months into the Spanish Civil War – he was unsurprisingly chosen to lead the Nationalist rebels against the democratic loyalists of the Second Spanish Republic.

At the outset of the civil war, on August 29, 1936 – a little over a month before Franco took power – the Nationalist *Junta de Defensa Nacional* issued Decree Number 77, which declared: "The red and gold/yellow bicolor flag is re-established as the flag of Spain." By the time Franco was in charge, the only noticeable difference between these warring flags was the lower band – either purple for the Republicans or red for the Nationalists – making it difficult to tell foe from friend. So, on February 2, 1938, General Franco issued a new coat of arms for his Nationalist flag – a coat of arms that would live on the flag of the Spanish state until 1945.

This new fascist flag was deeply reminiscent of the banner flag created by Isabella and Ferdinand during the unification of Castile, Leon, and Aragon. I'll leave a picture of the flag in the show notes, but if you remember from the earlier in the episode, this complex banner was a tapestry of four gold castles for Castile; four crowned lions for Leon; and four gold and red banners for the Kingdom of Aragon. Franco's flag added the two linked cross and chain motifs for the ancient Kingdom of Navarre; the Yoke and Arrows of the Fascist Party; a large, bejeweled crown above the coat of arms; and, most jarringly, a massive black eagle – supposedly the eagle of John the Evangelist – but undoubtedly added to align his regime with the black-eagle symbols of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Along with "Plus Ultra," he ironically added a new motto to the flag, incorporating the words, "Una Grande y Libre" – "One Great and Free." Franco truly believed that because Isabella and Ferdinand drove the last Muslims from Spain, and he drove out the last communists and socialists, his adoption of the 15th Century banner as Spain's coat of arms on the flag would liken his regime in the minds of the Spanish people to that of the old and idealized Catholic Monarchs. And like the Catholic Monarchs, Franco would proclaim Spain a monarchy in 1947 – but instead of installing a Bourbon king, the self-proclaimed "traditional monarchist" would rule as one himself.



Francisco Franco – the Spanish dictator, known as the *generalissimo* – lived up to his reputation as a man of good luck by surviving as the sole fascist leader in Europe after the fall of Germany, Italy, and their satellite states at the end of World War II. You see, Franco played his cards right by never officially joining on the side of Axis Powers, remaining a neutral and non-belligerent nation, and only allowing his Spanish volunteer soldiers to fight against the Soviet Communists – never firing a shot at the Western Alliance. So, as fascism fell all around him, the *generalissimo* would hold onto power in Spain. And in 1945, to keep up with the times, he quietly redesigned the fascist black eagle on the Spanish flag to...well...look a just little less fascist to the rest of the world. And to his famous good luck, this ploy worked.

Franco would rule a fascist Spain until his death of natural causes on November 20, 1975, at the age of 82. And just two days later, the Bourbon monarchy was officially restored for the first time since 1931 with King Juan Carlos I taking the throne on November 22 – and the only European head of state to attend Franco’s funeral. In 1977, the new constitutional monarchy of Spain under Juan Carlos would once again redesign the black eagle on the Spanish flag by lowering its head, closing its beak, and spreading its wings to appear as open arms – a stark contrast to the fascist eagle of Franco, marking an official end of dictatorship in Spain and a new age of political freedom and democracy. And with the new, democratic constitution officially adopted by the Spanish Parliament in 1978, the *Rojigualda* flag of Spain you see today was born, and it was adopted into law in 1981.

As we close the show, let’s answer the question we asked at the beginning of this episode: what do the symbols of the Spanish flag really mean? Well, the red-gold-red bands are for the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and the Catalan regions by Isabella and Ferdinand, first adopted as the naval ensign by King Charles III to differentiate his navy from other European powers in 1785, and then established as the flag of the Kingdom of Spain under Queen Isabella II during the Carlist Wars in 1843. The quartered shield protects the ancient symbols of the four medieval Spanish kingdoms: the red and gold castle for Castile; the crowned purple lion for Leon; the vertical red-and-gold stripes for Aragon; and the cross and chain for Navarre. Unmistakably at its center are the three golden fleur de lis on a blue background, representing the Bourbon dynasty, which sits on the throne today with King Felipe VI. Beneath the shield is the flower of Granada, captured from the Moors in 1492 to unify the Spanish nation; and on either side of the coat of arms are the Pillars of Hercules, believed to have been built by the Greek demi-god himself at the Straits of Gibraltar. And on these pillars are the words “Plus Ultra,” meaning “further beyond,” the motto of the old Spanish Empire which at one time ruled the New World in the Americas – a world which still speaks the language of Spain’s conquistadors to this very day.

That’s it for this episode of why the flag. You can read show notes at [flagpodcast.com](http://flagpodcast.com) and follow us on Instagram @flagpod. And make sure you subscribe to this show on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Stitcher, and don’t forget to give us five stars in the app – it really helps. Thank you for listening, and I’ll see you next time.