



Simón Bolívar. *El Libertador (Bolívar diplomático)*, Rita Matilde de la Peñuela.



EL LIBERTADOR

SIMÓN BOLÍVAR AND THE SPANISH AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

“It would be far too tedious to describe in detail . . . the labors performed by the troops of the Army of Liberation. . . . The winter on the flooded plains, the frozen peaks of the Andes, the sudden changes of climate, an army twice inured to war and in control of the best military positions of South America—these and many other obstacles we managed to overcome at Paya, Gámeza, Vargas, Boyacá and Popayán, in order to liberate in less than three months twelve provinces of New Granada.”¹ So spoke Simón Bolívar, liberator of much of South America, after his 1,000-mile march with 2,500 battle-tested soldiers from Angostura, Venezuela, up the Orinoco River, and ultimately over the towering 13,000-foot Andes to Nueva Granada (present-day Colombia) in the summer of 1819. His daring campaign still stands as one of the most challenging and forbidding military expeditions of all time. As one South American historian wrote, “Other crossings of mountains may have been more adroit and of a more exemplary strategy, [but] none so audacious, so heroic and legendary.”² Without this expedition, the ensuing Battle of Boyacá in August 1819 would never have been fought and won, and Bolívar’s dream of a free and independent South America would never have come to pass. His surprising victory cleared the pathway to independence for Venezuela, New Granada, Bolivia, Ecuador, and eventually Peru.

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1. “Message to the Congress of Angostura,” 14 December 1819, in Lecuna, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, 1:211, item 80 (hereafter *Selected Writings*).
 2. J. E. Rodó, as cited in Sherwell, *Simón Bolívar*, 125.

A LIFE IN PREPARATION

Simón Bolívar y Palacios, the youngest of four children, was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on 24 July 1783. He came from a wealthy aristocratic family whose Spanish ancestry in South America extended back seven generations to an earlier Simón Bolívar who had immigrated to Venezuela in 1578. A nervous, idealistic man whose parents both died young, young Bolívar inherited his family's fortune and learned to fend for himself, to think and act independently, and to run the family ranch and plantations. From Hipólita, his childhood nurse who was an enslaved black woman, he learned compassion, fairness, and a respect for races other than his own. "I never knew any father but her," Bolívar later said of her.³ An early tutor, Andrés Bello, who was one of South America's finest men of letters, taught him how to read and appreciate literature and the arts.

From Simón Rodríguez, his other teacher and lifelong friend, he gained an intellectual appreciation for Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, the lofty aims of the French Revolution, and the recent conquests of Napoléon. Rodríguez instilled in Bolívar an iron will and a penchant for health, hiking, and horsemanship. From him Bolívar also learned early to read voraciously, write clearly, converse intelligently, and believe in himself and his innate abilities. Years later, Bolívar referred to Rodríguez as his personal Robinson Crusoe for discovering within him oceans of self-confidence, islands of inspiration, and waves of personal motivation. He learned also to be an incessant talker. "He talked to everyone, always, anywhere, throughout his life," and this was at a time when revolution against the ruling Spanish power was becoming the table talk of all Venezuela.⁴

Although his family were Creoles, or white South Americans of European Spanish derivation, they suffered from many of the same inequities and injustices that lower classes in society were then experiencing. The rigid class system descended from the Creole to the mestizos, those with mixed white and indigenous ancestry; to the *pardos*, those with mixed white and black ancestry; to the blacks, of whom many were slaves; and to the *zambos*, who were a mixture of black and indigenous ancestry. At the bottom of the social ladder were the indigenous slave populations. They had suffered most acutely at the hands of their Spanish overseers since Hernán Cortés had defeated Montezuma and his Aztec empire in Mexico in 1521 and since Francisco Pizarro's conquest of the Incas in gold-laden Peru in 1533. Pursuing a Machiavellian policy that at first consisted of a single government over all of South America and Mexico and centered in Peru, Spanish authorities over time had established a system of viceroys in New Granada, Buenos Aires, and elsewhere throughout the continent. These agents of Spanish colonial power wielded despotic power, and their injustices and cruelty defy comprehension.⁵ In Peru alone, the El Dorado of South America, Spanish

3. As cited in Trend, *Bolívar*, 28.

4. Rourke, *Man of Glory*, 19.

5. As of 1800, the Spanish viceroalties in Spanish America were New Spain (the western USA and most of Central America), New Granada, Peru, Río de la Plata (consisting of much of Argentina), and Chile. Brazil was a Portuguese colony. (See map on page 210.)

authorities operated fourteen hundred gold mines, where indigenous peoples were forced to labor for months at a time as beasts of burden under the most degrading and dehumanizing circumstances. One scholar has estimated that eight million native South American natives died working in such hellholes in Peru—many were buried alive. “Oppression, violence, and arbitrariness were the only laws that ruled in [the Spanish colonies],” and whole tribes committed suicide rather than work under such oppressive circumstances.⁶ Consider this consequence of resistance, as one of tens of thousands discovered in 1780:

His wife and children, as well as his brother-in-law Bastidas, were put to death before his eyes, his tongue was cut out, and he was torn to pieces by four horses; his body was reduced to ashes and his legs and arms were sent to the towns that had revolted. His house was razed, his property confiscated, his family was declared infamous forever, and one of his brothers was sent to Spain and condemned to the galleys, where he remained thirty years. The Indians [native peoples] were deprived of their privileges, if any remained, their festivals and meetings were abolished, and it was forbidden that any one should take the title of Inca.⁷

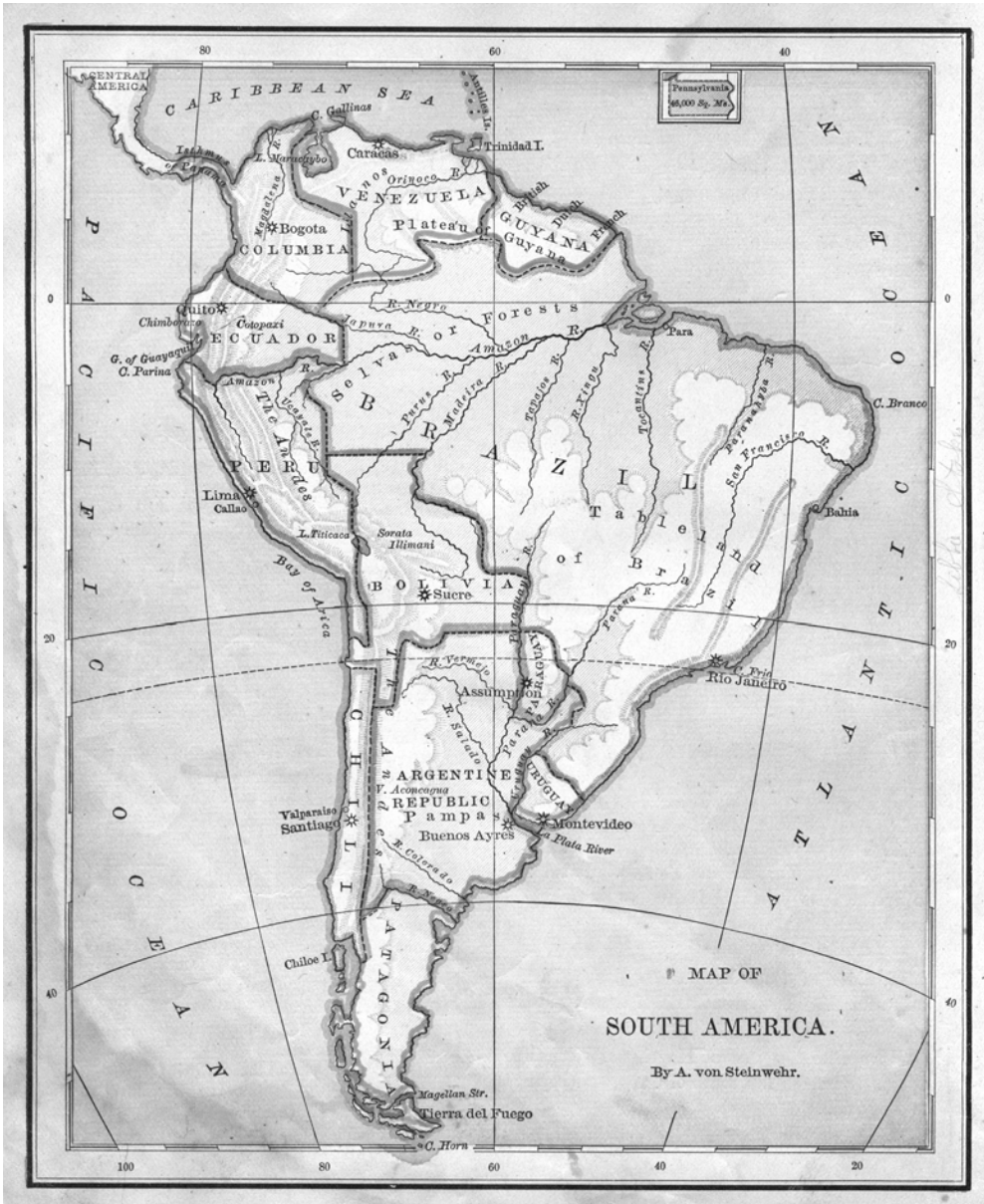
In the century after Cortés and Pizarro, a staggering twenty million natives may have perished due to Spanish colonial inhumanity, warfare, trade in alcohol, and the importation of smallpox from Europe and yellow fever from African slaves. Peru’s native populations declined by 90 percent, and Brazil’s by 95 percent. “In the Caribbean, the indigenous population was virtually annihilated.”⁸ Little wonder that by the time of Bolívar much of the continent—including Brazil, whose Portuguese overseers were just as cruel as their Spanish counterparts—was a revolution in waiting, fueled by centuries of ensconced tyranny, malignant neglect, and unjust oppression. It was a terror that ranks with the Holocaust of the twentieth century in its demonizing inhumanity.

Through prominent business leaders and plantation owners, the Creole establishment was forced to trade its cocoa, tobacco, cotton, indigo, coffee, and other crops with only the Caracas Company, which was granted a monopoly by Madrid over almost all Venezuelan trade. While permitting a Creole aristocracy, authorities denied it opportunities for education, international travel, a free press, and even reading—in short, “denying it the privileges an aristocracy demand.” Add to this volatile mix prohibitively high taxes, pervasive racial animosities, and the vagaries of a system of justice that would not guarantee due process of

6. Jones, *History of South America*, 75, 81. The term then in use was *encomienda*, a grant from the Spanish crown to colonists in America conferring the right to demand tribute and labor from the native populations in return for providing supposed education, Christianization, and protection.

7. Jones, *History of South America*, 83.

8. Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures*, 257.



Map of South America, by A. von Steinwehr. iStock Photo by Getty Images.

law, and it is not surprising that Spain was “on a powder keg to which she herself had applied the slow match.”⁹

9. Rourke, *Man of Glory*, 6–7.

Stirred to destroy this centuries-long Spanish oppression, the young Simón Bolívar penned the following diatribe: “The fierce Spaniard, spewed upon the shores of Colombia, proceeded to transform Nature’s loveliest of territories into a vast and odious empire of cruelty and plunder. . . . He signaled his entrance into the New World by death and desolation. He annihilated the original inhabitants, and, when his raging fury found no others left to destroy, he turned upon his own sons whom he had brought forth in the land that he had usurped. . . . Would that we were not compelled by cruel necessity to exterminate these foul murderers!”¹⁰

However, it would have to be a controlled and careful revolution. The Creoles, while sympathetic, feared the disruption of commerce and trade and the potential for slave insurrections if the taste of freedom took hold too quickly. And what of retribution from Spain if the revolution failed? Who, then, would pay the price? Preserving the status quo may not have been desirable, but it was at least the easy way, safe and known.

As for the church, its sympathies were conservative and distinctly loyalist. The Jesuits, especially, were critical of revolutionary talk, and some of them were believed to double as spies for the Spanish viceroalties. While Bolívar himself was more a skeptic than an atheist, more a deist than a Christian, he always attended mass but was at best a guarded Catholic. Over time, he came to regard the church as a rapacious agent of the old regime and thus became a deist, disinclined toward theology and bent more toward the study of history and philosophy.

In 1798 Bolívar’s uncle sent him, at the age of fifteen, to Spain to gain a better education than Venezuela could offer him. In Madrid he lived under the roof of another uncle, Esteban Palacios, the first stable influence in his life, and in this uncle’s spacious library, Bolívar continued his studies of history, mathematics, and languages, like Napoléon. In the process, Bolívar began to formulate his life’s philosophy and a lifelong love of books and serious reading of both classical and modern Age of Reason authors including Homer, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire. Young, impressionable, and possessing an inquiring, independent mind, he came to believe that the sovereignty of the people, the division of powers, civil liberty, prohibition of slavery, the abolition of monarchy, and a written constitution were greatly preferable—and inevitable—forms of government.¹¹

His stay in Europe, coming at a most momentous time in history, taught him firsthand about the rising power of Napoléon, the importance of sea power, the supremacy of the British navy, and the declining influence of a French-occupied Spain. If George Washington’s America could overthrow imperial British occupation, by what right and by what reduced power did Spain remain in control of South America? As much as he came to dislike Napoléon’s lust for power, personal ambition, and despotism, Bolívar was nonetheless inspired by the awe and acclaim *Le Petit Caporal* generated wherever he went. Like Beethoven, Bolívar revered the Napoléon he also came to detest. “What seems great to me,” Bolívar later admitted, “was

10. Simón Bolívar to James Cockburn, 2 October 1813, in *Selected Writings*, item 16, 1:39, 42.

11. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 29.

the universal acclaim and interest that his person inspired. This, I confess, made me think of my country's slavery and the glory in store for the man who would free her."¹²

At age seventeen, he met and married his charming fourth cousin, the nineteen-year-old María Teresa Rodríguez del Toro y Alayza, in 1802. Sadly, just eight months later and shortly after their return to Venezuela, she died of a malignant fever, leaving a deep romantic yearning in Bolívar's heart that a long line of later mistresses could hardly fulfill. Returning to Europe in 1803 to drown his youthful sorrows, he gave free rein to his desires. Handsome, rich, daring, independent, a meticulous dresser, and a dashing dancer, Bolívar was a Zorro-like temptation some women could not resist. The stories of his later affairs are the things of love and legend. He was a frequent visitor to Paris's notorious Palais-Royal, where honor and virtue were left at the door.

Yet, if forever attracted to beautiful women, he would never remarry. María's untimely death was, as J. B. Trend has argued, the "crucial point" in Bolívar's career. It turned him to a life of power, politics, and patriotism. "I loved my wife," he admitted twenty-five years later. "When she died I swore that I would never marry again and I have kept my word. If I had not lost her, my whole life might have been different. I should not have been General Bolívar or the Liberator."¹³ Sex was an enjoyable interlude, not his dominant passion. He reserved that for love of country and freedom.

In company with Simón Rodríguez, Bolívar walked all over Europe. While in Paris, Bolívar missed Napoléon's coronation as emperor in 1804, but he did see Napoléon in full field uniform and military array at the Battle of Marengo near Turin, Italy, and saw him later crowned king of Italy. While in Paris, he may have dined with Alexander von Humboldt (see chapter 12), just back from his amazing archaeological expeditions throughout Central and South America. Some argue that Humboldt encouraged the young Bolívar to return and spread the cry of South American freedom. Later, at Monte Sacro, a hillside just outside of Rome, the twenty-three-year-old Bolívar, freshly stirred by the Napoléon conquests, in a moment of inspiration and personal deduction, uttered his famous life-changing oath: "I swear by the God of my forefathers, I swear by my forefathers, I swear by my native land, that I shall never allow my hands to be idle nor my soul to rest until I have broken the shackles which bind us to Spain."¹⁴

Years later, Bolívar wrote an endearing letter to Rodríguez. "Do you recall how we went together to the Monte Sacro at Rome, to pledge upon that holy ground the freedom of our country?" he asked. "You molded my heart for liberty, justice, greatness, and beauty. I have followed the path you traced for me. You were my pilot, though you remained upon the shores of Europe. You cannot imagine how deeply and engraved upon my heart are the lessons you taught me. Never could I delete so much as a comma from the great precepts that

12. De Lacroix, *Diario de Bucaramanga*, 64–66, as cited in Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 25.

13. As cited in Trend, *Bolívar*, 38.

14. Rourke, *Man of Glory*, 32.

you set before me. They have been ever present in my mind's eye: I have followed them as infallible guides."¹⁵

Bolívar believed that “only democracy . . . is amenable to absolute liberty”¹⁶—but a democracy founded on and guaranteed by a written constitution and with it a strong constitutional executive (though not a monarchy) and an elected legislative form of government. “Nothing in our fundamental laws would have to be altered were we to adopt a legislative power similar to that held by the British Parliament,” he further said.¹⁷ And with such a free democracy, slavery could not be maintained but rather abolished.

On returning to Caracas, Bolívar sensed the time was ripe for revolt against a Spain preoccupied with waging a civil war against Napoléon's puppet brother, King Joseph, who came to power in May 1808. Lord Nelson had destroyed the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar, and Britain, a cautious ally, now controlled the waves. All over South America, as if on cue, juntas and provincial assemblies began to rise up in rebellion, declaring feigned allegiance on the one hand to Fernando VII of Spain—a son of Charles IV who had been forced by Napoléon to renounce his rule over Spain—while on the other hand plotting schemes of independence. Such a backdoor, boring-from-within revolutionary movement manifested a pretext of loyalty to the Spanish king while cloaking its real purpose.

The newly formed Venezuelan or Caracas Junta—led by Bolívar, José Félix Ribas, Mariano and Tomás Montilla, and others—secretly began meeting at Bolívar's plantation home in veiled conspiracy while publicly proclaiming Spanish allegiance. Their forceful deportation from Caracas of the Spanish vice-regent, Captain General Vicente Emparán in April 1810, was the powder keg of Venezuelan revolution. The first independent government in South America came into being in Caracas, and on 5 July 1811 the city council of Caracas and the newly formed congress declared Venezuelan independence. By the end of the year, the same pattern held true in many other South American countries, with independent governments established in Buenos Aires (25 May), Bogotá (20 July), and Santiago, Chile (18 September). Said Bolívar, “What do we care if Spain submits to Napoléon, if we have decided to be free? Let us without fear lay the cornerstone of South American freedom. To hesitate is to die.”¹⁸

Bolívar was by all accounts an exceptionally complex man who reveled in his own sense of independence. As the scholar, Eduard Fueter, said of him almost a century ago, Bolívar was an oxymoron, “a born hero of freedom, a logical idealist, absolutely unselfish, incomparably energetic, and ahead of his time,” a man in a hurry who, while in quest of personal glory, disdained the idea of dictatorial rule, whether his or that of anyone else. Like Napoléon, he possessed supreme self-confidence. If he did not have Napoléon's military genius, he shared his tranquility and composure when under attack. A master at guerilla

15. Bolívar to Simón Rodríguez, 19 January 1824, in *Selected Writings*, 2:424, 449.

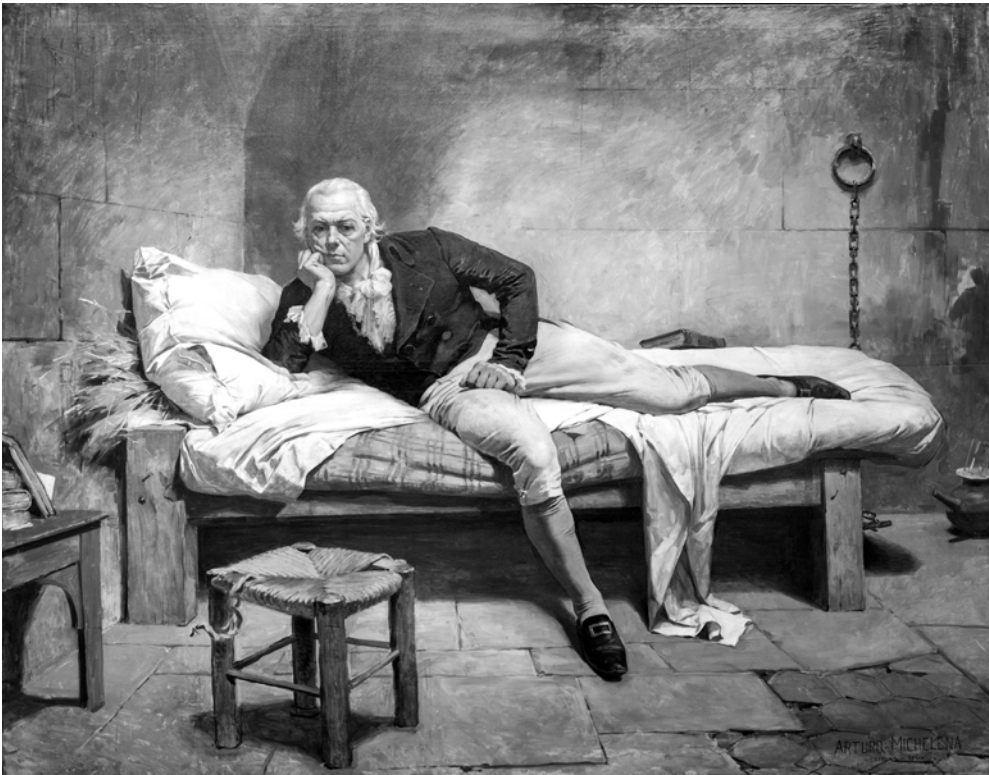
16. Address delivered by Simon Bolívar at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela in Angostura, 15 February 1819, in *Selected Writings*, item 50, 1:178.

17. Address delivered by Simon Bolívar at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela in Angostura, 15 February 1819, in *Selected Writings*, item 50, 1:185.

18. As cited in Sherwell, *Simón Bolívar*, 31.

warfare, he proved his military mettle time and time again. His calm but firm decisiveness served him well on the battlefield and in the halls of congress or parliament. A man of vision, he created his own opportunities. At the brink of becoming a dictator, he always shrank back to exercising mere presidential, constitutional powers and privileges. Highly creative and deeply intelligent, he was an intellectual in uniform, a philosopher in politics, and an objective and impartial thinker blessed with the power of persuasion. A keen student of human nature, he had “a will of iron, strengthened, not weakened, by adversity and was above pettiness.”¹⁹

Almost immediately, the new provisional government dispatched Bolívar to London to seek foreign recognition and to gain a British blockade of the Spanish Main, or northern coasts of South America. While in London, Bolívar met up with General Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816), who two years earlier had launched an abortive effort to jump-start Venezuelan independence. Called an “apostle of human liberty,” Miranda had the vision to free all of South America and unite the continent into one or two federalist nations. A native Venezuelan by birth, a popular soldier with Lafayette in the American Revolutionary



Miranda en la Carraca, 1896, by Arturo Michelena.

19. Salcedo-Bastardo, *Bolívar*, 34.

War, and later a general in Napoléon's Grande Armée, Miranda was an avid supporter of, if not the inspiration for, Venezuelan political independence. His ill-timed 1806 three-boat invasion of Coro, Venezuela, was too little and too soon. Intercepted by Spanish warships, Miranda barely got away to British-controlled Barbados, where he raised another small force to await a more favorable tide.

In London, Bolívar and Miranda together sought out British help for the Venezuelan independence movement. Lord Wellesley (the Duke of Wellington), then British secretary of foreign affairs, played a very careful hand. He was reluctant to offend Spain, their ally in fighting Napoléon, but anxious to gain economic and political influence in the South American independence movement. He chose not to meet them in his public office but only privately at home. He could not openly support Venezuelan independence but promised assistance if French interference became manifest. Bolívar also met William Wilberforce, who encouraged him in his plans to eradicate slavery from the continent.

Enthusiasm aside, a successful independence movement was far from certain, primarily for economic, social, and military purposes. Bolívar's own Venezuelan aristocracy, or Creoles and plantation owners, were fearful that a revolution against Spain would so advance the cause of abolition among the slave populations that it would go too far and foster widespread dissatisfaction, even insurrection, among less-privileged classes. Furthermore, if Great Britain became involved there was no assurance that it would honor Creole monopolies and controls over trade. Labor costs would accelerate, with slave labor becoming a thing of the past. And lest one forget, Spain still had well-trained and well-equipped royalist armies all over much of South America. Thus, when the sixty-year-old General Miranda made his third and final invasion, he overestimated the support he thought he would receive from local Venezuelan leaders.

A far better field soldier than politician, Miranda also mistakenly shunned the guerilla warfare his circumstances required. His temerity, poor planning, and overestimation of local support forced him to surrender to Spanish forces in July 1812. Sensing that the time to confront Spanish control had not yet arrived, Bolívar declared Miranda's surrender was treasonable and thwarted Miranda's attempt to escape, eventually handing him over to the Spanish Royal Army. A concert with Miranda at this premature stage, Bolívar reasoned, would have doomed the liberation movement at the start. Bolívar has been roundly criticized for his actions against Miranda ever since. Soon captured and deported, Miranda rotted away, chained to a wall in a dark Spanish dungeon in Cádiz. He died four years later on 14 July 1816, all the while convinced that Bolívar had betrayed him and the cause of revolution by failing to confront and defeat the local Spanish royalist forces.²⁰ An unfortunate early casualty of Venezuela's independence movement, Miranda is still honored as a martyr and revered as a guiding force and lover of liberty in Spanish American history.

20. An oil painting by artist Arturo Michelena titled *Miranda en la Carraca* (1896) portrays the hero in prison, a graphic symbol in Venezuelan history.

Meanwhile Bolívar, after being questioned and detained by Spanish forces, soon found himself at the head of the independence forces. As a former second lieutenant in his father's local militia, did he really have the soldiering skills to fight a war against General Domingo de Monteverde and his battle-tested army of 12,000-plus Spanish soldiers?

Miranda's defeat was actually the second ill omen; the first was an act of God—at least the Catholic clergy thought so. On 26 March 1812, Holy Thursday, a devastating earthquake destroyed virtually the entire city of Caracas, killing more than twenty thousand people, including entire regiments of the newly formed revolutionary army, while inextricably sparing most royalist forces. “Whose side was God on anyway?” asked many who had quietly supported the rebel cause. Defying nature's apparent decree, an unsuperstitious Bolívar worked in the ruins round the clock, saving the lives of many cramped or crushed in the debris. With the Catholic Church blaming the revolutionary junta for bringing down God's wrath, an emboldened Monteverde took the offensive and won. Viewed as the real ringleader of the revolutionaries, Bolívar fled to Cartagena, New Granada (Colombia). Round one of Venezuela's quest for independence ended with the First Republic, like Caracas itself, in ruins.

The atrocities visited upon revolutionary sympathizers by Monteverde and his royalist troops were Inquisition-like in their savage butchery and ferocity. “Spare no one over seven years,” he decreed. Thousands of men, women, and children were impaled or hacked to death and their heads fastened to fence posts as gruesome reminders of the fate of anyone disloyal to Spain. However, in the long run, Monteverde's atrocities in his antirevolutionary *Guerra a Muerte*, or “War to the Death,” proved damaging to the royalist cause, causing some in the Creole establishment to look more favorably on Bolívar's cause.

Bolívar now concluded that if liberty was to be achieved, he alone had the passion and self-confidence to accomplish it. He may have been right. As historian J. B. Trend has again argued, Bolívar saw himself as a practical revolutionary and a logical dreamer who understood the Venezuelan mind and soul and who would carefully outmaneuver militarily and outflank his enemy politically.²¹ Enlisting the kind of local sympathy and support Miranda had failed to do, Bolívar rallied military support in New Granada for his fragile cause. His rapidly growing forces of both men and not a few women fought six pitched battles, defeated five armies, and marched seven hundred miles in a three-month period. Using surprise attacks, he eventually regained Caracas and, as the newly christened Savior of the Country and Liberator of Venezuela, he proclaimed the rebirth of the republic on 6 August 1813. Hailed by adoring crowds and maidens dressed in white who threw garlands at his feet, Bolívar took especial delight in one Josefina Machado, who became his acknowledged mistress for the next five years.

Not wanting to make the same mistakes in this Second Republic as in the first, Bolívar trusted few, if anyone. He could be as vengeful and merciless as his enemies, ordering the retaliatory execution of over eight hundred Spanish prisoners in his Decree of War to the

21. Trend, *Bolívar*, 94.

Death. “The time has come at last to repay the Spaniards torture for torture,” he said, “and to drown that race of annihilators in its own blood or in the sea.”²²

The main body of Spanish forces, however, had only retreated to the plains further south, where they formed an uneasy alliance with the llaneros, feared but fickle bandit horsemen of the plains, who were mostly blacks and *pardos*. Meanwhile General José Tomás Boves replaced Monteverde, who returned to Spain. More monstrous in cruelty than his predecessors, Boves launched a counteroffensive in which thousands more were massacred and dismembered, and he roundly defeated Bolívar’s smaller and less equipped forces at Aragua in August 1813. For the second time, Bolívar escaped to New Granada, Washington-like in his tactical retreat. He learned how to turn military misfortune into a strength. “The novice soldier believes all is lost when he has once been routed. Experience has not proved to him that bravery, skill and perseverance can mend misfortune.”²³ Realizing more than ever that their brightest hope for permanent independence now lay with Bolívar, New Granada made him captain general of the Army of Confederation.

A new Spanish general field marshal, Pablo Morillo, fresh from Spain with forty-two transports of thousands of additional troops, continued the offensive with a comprehensive strategy to conquer New Granada, destroy Bolívar, march to Peru and Buenos Aires, and extinguish once and for all the entire simmering South American independence movement. By the end of 1814, all of Venezuela lay in Morillo’s grasp, and within three months he had conquered New Granada, subjecting it to the same kind of cruelty and punishment Monteverde and Boves had inflicted on Venezuela. Bolívar barely escaped, this time to the British isle of Jamaica.

In forced exile, Bolívar, shaken—though not defeated—penned his famous “Jamaica Letter” on 6 September 1815, soon after hearing news of the Battle of Waterloo. This document was a requiem to past failures, as John Lynch described it, a celebration of future victories, and a justification for continued warfare.²⁴ Sensing the need to more fully justify and explain to local supporters and foreign allies alike his political vision that had engulfed his homeland into a nightmarish bloody civil war, he put down his sword and took up his pen.

Bolívar’s “Jamaica Letter” was an urgent cry for help, a reiteration of the inevitability of independence, and a vision for his future of South America. Written at the nadir of his revolutionary cause and addressed to his fellow countrymen, potential allies, and even his enemies, the document remains a landmark in South American independence history.

First and foremost, he argued that Spain had brought this disaster upon itself. Its history of abject cruelty, continued mismanagement, and painful oppression since the time of Cortés and Pizarro were so atrocious that they “appear to be beyond the human capacity

22. Simón Bolívar, “Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of this Island (Jamaica)” (frequently titled “Jamaica Letter”), 6 September 1815, in *Selected Writings*, letter 41, 1:106–7.

23. “Memorial to the Citizens of New Granada by a Citizen of Caracas,” 15 December 1812, in *Selected Writings*, item 9, 1:20.

24. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 91.

for evil.”²⁵ He wrote that Spanish absolutism has not only “deprived us of our rights but has kept us in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs[,] . . . no better than that of serfs.”²⁶ The result is “the hatred that the Peninsula has inspired in us is greater than the ocean between us. It would be easier to have the two continents meet than to reconcile the spirits of the two countries.”²⁷ Nor could the clock turn back. Now that the Americas had begun to taste freedom and seen the light, “it is not our desire to be thrust back into darkness. The chains have been broken; [and] we have been freed.”²⁸

While seeking aid, the letter was also a supremely confident reiteration of ultimate and inevitable victory. “We must not lose faith,” Bolívar wrote, and “success will crown our efforts” if for no other reason than that Spain is a weak and declining European power, “a phantom nation” lacking manufacturers, agricultural products, crafts and sciences, and even policies. Spain is an “aged serpent, bent only on satisfying its venomous rage [and] devouring the fairest part of our globe. . . . What madness for our enemy to hope to reconquer America when she has no navy, no funds, and almost no soldiers!”²⁹

Seeking financial and military support from both Europe and “our brothers of the North [who] have been apathetic bystanders in this struggle,” Bolívar argued that a free and independent South America would eventually promise far greater trading opportunities with the United States and other nations than Spanish colonial rule had ever provided.³⁰ As a declaration of independence and an intellectual attempt to institutionalize the revolution, the “Jamaica Letter” promised a free society founded on the principles of justice, liberty, and equality. The various juntas already established on the continent had elected free and democratic governments based on a constitutional system of checks and balances that would protect civil liberties and ensure the rights of men.³¹

To Bolívar, independence and freedom alone were not enough; his extended vision was for some kind of unity or, at the very least, a strong democratic confederation of South American nations governed not by a monarch but by a strong centralized executive and congress resident in one of the greater nations, perhaps Mexico. “It is a grandiose idea to think of consolidating the New World into a single nation,” he realistically admitted. “This is not possible,” for “[South] America is separated by climatic differences, geographical diversity, conflicting interests, and dissimilar characteristics.”³² “The American states need the care of paternal governments to heal the sores and wounds of despotism and war.”³³ An

25. “Reply of a South American,” 1:104.

26. “Reply of a South American,” 1:111.

27. “Reply of a South American,” 1:104–5.

28. “Reply of a South American,” 1:105.

29. “Reply of a South American,” 1:104–7.

30. “Reply of a South American,” 1:108.

31. “Reply of a South American,” 1:111–15.

32. “Reply of a South American,” 1:118.

33. “Reply of a South American,” 1:115.

exceptionally complex man, a “liberator who scorned liberalism,” and a “soldier who disparaged militarism,” Bolívar was both realist and idealist wrapped in an “uneasy rivalry.”³⁴

With only a few hundred men and enough arms for six thousand more provided by Jamaica and Haiti, the intrepid Bolívar returned to undertake the impossible. This time, however, he would proclaim freedom for the slaves while encouraging them to take up the cause. After a failed landing and a forced return to Haiti, Bolívar returned for the fourth time on 1 January 1817, this time for good.

Rather than confronting Morillo head-on in Caracas, Bolívar scoured the jungles to the east in search of support from *pardos* and former slaves. Seeking refuge, his growing band of multiracial followers and British mercenaries gravitated eastward to Angostura, where Bolívar suffered his most stunning defeat at the Battle of La Puerta in early 1818. Bolívar began to professionalize his army with clear rankings and sound discipline. In February 1819 he reconvened a new Venezuelan republican government at the Congress of Angostura, where he proclaimed a new constitution while awaiting the arrival of much-needed reinforcements. One such new recruit, a former British officer turned mercenary, later took time to describe his new commander. “We had long wished to see this celebrated man,” he wrote,

whose extraordinary energy and perseverance, under every disadvantage, have since effected the liberty of a large portion of South America. . . . He was then about 35, but looked upwards of 40; in stature, short—perhaps five feet five or six,—but well proportioned and remarkably active. His countenance, even then, was thin, and evidently careworn, with an expression of patient endurance under adversity, . . . however his fiery temper may at times have appeared to contradict the supposition. His manners not only appeared elegant, surrounded as he was by men far his inferiors in birth and education, but must have been intrinsically so; . . . [dressed in] a plain round jacket of blue cloth, with red cuffs, and three rows of gilt sugar-loaf buttons; course blue trousers; and *alpar-gates*, or sandals (the soles of which are made of the fibres of the aloe plaited), completed his dress. He carried in his hand a light lance, with a small black banner, having embroidered on it a white skull and crossed bones, with the motto “*Muerte ò Libertad!*”³⁵

Recognizing the utter futility of a frontal attack on Morillo’s expanding army, Bolívar hit upon a daring and most dangerous strategy.³⁶ Leaving behind a small battalion to veil his true intent, he set out on 27 May 1819 with twenty-one hundred men on a circle-the-mountains strategy. His aim was to travel up the Orinoco River, traverse the savannah

34. Lynch, “Simón Bolívar,” 6. Bolívar wrote: “My greatest weakness is my love of liberty: this leads me to forget even my desire for glory. I will undergo anything, abandon all my hopes, rather than pass for a tyrant, or even be suspected of it. My ruling passion, my one aspiration, is to be known as a *lover of liberty*.” *Obrus Complete*, as cited in Salcedo-Bastardo, *Bolívar*, 36.

35. Vowell and Mahoney, *Campaigns and Cruises*, 1:65–67.

36. For a map of the 1819 campaign, see *Selected Writings*, 1:199.

of Casanare, scale the mighty Andes far to the west, overpower Spanish garrisons in New Granada, and finally march east from Caracas to Venezuela, surprising and challenging Morillo's rear. With a fall and wintertime march of some 1,500 miles over the most rugged terrain imaginable, his daring strategy owed everything to stealth, speed, and surprise.

The well-watered savannahs of the upper Orinoco—with their small islands, swamps, and lagoons extending as far as the eye could see—posed the first formidable obstacle. Infested with panthers, jaguars, and swarms of biting insects and plagued with pestilential diseases, oppressive heat, and sudden torrential rains, the region posed a never-ending challenge. For days they marched in water up to their armpits and fended off giant water snakes and alligators. The local boatmen took pains to avoid sailing under the trees that overhung the river lest the mast dislodge giant serpents from the branches. And many native tribes, such as the Yanomami, were unfriendly. To complicate matters, many towns along the route were predominantly royalist in sentiment. At El Morichal, a band of women came close to assassinating Bolívar as he returned from early mass by attempting to stab him to death with daggers they had concealed under their mantillas. By the time the army reached the village of Socha, their uniforms were in tatters, their boots long gone, and many officers literally without trousers, forced to cover themselves with pieces of blankets or whatever else they could obtain. Local women offered their own clothes to the tattered soldiers. And as bad as the first month had been, now stood before them the almost impassable wall of the towering Andes, as described by one of Bolívar's trusted and keenly observant British officers:

The snowy peaks of the Andes were now frequently seen . . . ; and . . . opposed an inaccessible barrier to [our] entrance into New Granada. The more, indeed, a stranger gazes on them, the less he can conceive the practicability of passing them. The narrow paths leading to the *Paramos*, wind among wild mountains, which are totally uninhabited, and covered with immense forests, overhanging the road, and almost excluding the light of day. . . . An incessant drizzling rain . . . had rendered the paths so slippery, when our army passed, that they became excessively dangerous; especially to the few tired mules and bullocks, that yet survived the fatigues of [our] march. . . . Multitudes of small crosses are fixed in the rocks, by some pious hands, in memory of former travelers who have died here; and along the path are strewn fragments of saddlery, trunks, and various articles, that have been abandoned, and resemble the traces of a routed army. Huge pinnacles of granite overhang many parts of these passes, apparently tottering, and on the point of overwhelming the daring traveler; while terrific chasms . . . yawn far beneath, as if to receive him. A sense of extreme loneliness, and remoteness from the world, seizes on his mind, and is heightened by the dead silence that prevails; not a sound being heard, but the scream of the *condòr*, and the monotonous murmur of the distant water-falls.³⁷

37. Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, 1:161–62, 164.

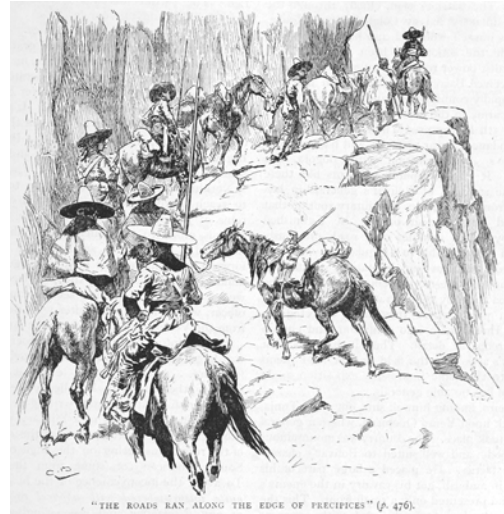
While scores of his men died along the way, the persistent, self-confident Libertador, in Hannibal-like fashion, finally succeeded in crossing the 13,000-foot Paramo de Pisba Pass and reaching New Granada. There he and General Santander of Cartagena combined forces to win the decisive Battle of Boyaca on 7 August 1819 against a far larger, thoroughly surprised, and unprepared royalist army.

From there Bolívar moved on to Bogotá, which the loyalists had deserted, liberating the heart of New Granada. Bolívar then completed his circuit march to Caracas, where he overpowered the Spanish army (whose more liberal officers had mutinied against their leaders) and ultimately returned in triumph to Angostura in December 1819. General Morillo, recognizing

he had been outfoxed by Bolívar, surrendered but not before saying of his foe, “What, that little man in the blue frock-coat and forage cap riding a mule?”³⁸ Morillo’s successor, General Manuel de la Torre, was soon afterward defeated at the Battle of Carabobo on 24 June 1821, and Venezuela’s ten-year struggle for independence was finally secured.

Hailed the *padre de la patria* (father of the country), destroyer of oppression, and victor over tyranny, Bolívar, in proclaiming the Fourth Republic, let his enthusiasm outpace the political realities. He proclaimed not only Venezuela’s permanent independence but also the unification of all the old vicerealties of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nueva Granada into the single state of the Republic of Colombia. Spain soon signed an armistice treaty (partly at General Morillo’s insistence back at the Spanish court), recognizing once and for all the legitimacy of Bolívar’s stunningly successful independence movement.³⁹

Bolívar’s amazing success soon caught the kind of international attention he had intended. Not only did England approve, but in the United States Senator Henry Clay proposed in the American Congress that Colombia be recognized as a free country, “worthy for many reasons to stand side by side with the most illustrious peoples of the world.”⁴⁰ Clay’s support affirmed America’s Monroe Doctrine of 1820 that had declared against any and all extensions of European powers into the Western Hemisphere (see chapter 11). It was a



Bolívar's Troops in the Cordillera Oriental, by Archibald Forbes.

38. O'Leary, *Narración*, 2:58, as cited in Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 137.

39. Trend, *Bolívar*, 151.

40. Sherwell, *Simón Bolívar*, 136.



The Battle of Boyacá, by Martín Tovar y Tovar (1890).

welcome sign of American support and a promise not to intervene. Mexico and Panama announced their independence at the same time.

IN SEARCH OF SOUTH AMERICAN UNIFICATION

Bolívar soon left Angostura for Bogotá, where he determined to take the revolution southward, eventually to Peru, the last bastion of Spanish rule. Without Peru, Spanish forces could still destabilize the hard-fought gains of the independence movement all over the continent. Defeating Peru, however, would prove challenging. Bolívar, unable to go by sea for fear of Spanish ships, left Bogotá on 13 December 1821, choosing to cross volcanic mountains and gorges of an even higher mountain range to reach Quito (Ecuador). Meanwhile, General Antonio José de Sucre and his army, marched south along the coast. After winning the battle of Bombona in April and then the Battle of Pichincha in May 1822, Bolívar marched into Quito, where a dozen young women in white crowned him in laurels. Bolívar wasted little time incorporating the so-called presidency of Ecuador into Greater Colombia.

Still a bachelor, Bolívar caught the eye of not only foreign observers. Since his wife's death some eighteen years before, he had had many mistresses—such as Josefina Machado and Joaquina Garaycoa, to name but two. Yet for years he did not find another woman he could love as he had María. That all began to change, however, during his eventful victory

parade into Quito. Watching from her balcony, the twenty-two-year-old Manuela Sáenz saw Bolívar for the first time. A passionate supporter of the republican cause, she quickly caught Bolívar's eye. An excellent equestrian and a skilled sharpshooter with a strongly independent mind, Manuela was "attractive and shapely, her oval face, pearl complexion, dark eyes and flowing hair the epitome of South American beauty."⁴¹ That evening at the victory ball, they danced the night away. The fact that Manuela was already married to a wealthy British merchant meant little to her in the light of this new romance. "What fire of love burns in my breast for you," she wrote to Bolívar soon afterward. "In fact we are all rivals in love with you."⁴²

The two fell madly in love. She soon wrote to her "dull" husband without a tinge of regret: "I do not live by social rules, invented only to torment. So leave me alone. . . . We will marry again when we are in heaven but not on earth. . . . You are boring, like your nation. . . . I will never return to you." But to her new lover: "I want to see you, to touch you, feel you, taste you, to join me in complete union. . . . Love me and don't go away, not even with God himself."⁴³

Writing back, Bolívar said, "I think of you and your situation every moment. Yes, I adore you. . . . You beg me to tell you that I do not love anyone but you. No. I do not love anyone else, nor shall I ever love another."⁴⁴ Years after they met, their letters were as passionate as ever. One day his newfound lover, who was almost always by his side, would even save his life. In many respects, Manuela was, as many called her, "La Libertadora."

Peru posed a particular challenge to the independence movement. As scholar Timothy Anna has noted, José Fernando de Abascal, Spanish viceroy of Peru from 1806 to 1816, had almost single-handedly stopped the spread of independence throughout much of the continent. A more just and enlightened administrator than any of his peers, Abascal was "a pillar of rectitude, honesty, clear thinking and leadership."⁴⁵ And although silver mine production had peaked some twenty years before, the nation was gripped in poverty. Abascal was respected by many for his sound administrative abilities, his love of humanity, and hard work. Thus, the war of independence, despite the Tupac Amaru uprising of a generation earlier, reached Peru last and did not create an organized underground or groundswell of popular opinion as in New Granada or Venezuela. Even the most liberal of Peru's enlightenment thinkers never actually advocated rebellion and did not join the cause for independence until after 1820. Except for tracts and leaflets imported from outside, insurgent literature did

41. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 179.

42. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 180.

43. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 181–82.

44. As cited in introduction to *Selected Writings*, xxvi. After Bolívar's death, she eked out an existence in the small Peruvian port of Paita, selling sweets until her death. Her biography remains to be written.

45. Anna, *Fall of the Royal Government*, 27.



Manuela Sáenz, by unknown artist.

not appear in any significant numbers until 1820. In short, Bolívar needed to convince Peru it was time for independence.⁴⁶

Several unexpected things happened, however, that played into his hands. The first was the economic collapse of Abascal's successor government of Viceroy Joaquín de la Pezuela that was brought on by the total cessation of Spanish shipping. Second, General José de San Martín—commanding officer of the United Provinces, liberator of southern South America, and arguably the finest military genius in South America—had already crossed the higher Andes to the south. After winning the battle of Chacabuco in 1817, he had liberated Santiago and eventually all Chile from royalist control. By July 1821, San Martín had subdued southern Peru and achieved possession of the capital city, Lima. Declaring,

“¡Viva la patria! ¡Viva la libertad! ¡Viva la independencia!” San Martín unfurled for the first time the flag of independent Peru on 28 July 1821.

Yet outside Lima, much of the country still lay firm in royalist hands. The two liberators met for the first time in Guayaquil. San Martín was suffering from a malicious malady and, having lost some of his earlier military influence, seemed anxious to leave Peru. While the two men agreed on the aims of independence, they differed on what form of government—monarchical or republican—Peru would eventually have. A better soldier than diplomat, San Martín quit his position of protector of Peru, ceded the new political arena in Peru to Bolívar, and retired to Argentina and eventually to Europe.⁴⁷

Chile's independence and that of many other South American states was further secured by the recruiting of a most valuable asset—the brave and resourceful English naval admiral Lord Thomas Cochrane (1775–1860). His bravery, skill, and daring exploits, so well proven in the Napoleonic Wars, were now put to the test in South America. Sailing under the Chilean flag, he blockaded ports, disrupted Spanish trade, and destroyed Spanish naval influence from the Spanish Main to Cape Horn. Called “El Diablo” by his Spanish enemies, Cochrane was to the sea what Bolívar and San Martín were on land. Peru's independence could not

46. Anna, *Fall of the Royal Government*, 31–33.

47. Robertson, *Rise of the Spanish-American Republic*, 200.

have been secured without Cochrane's naval transports and control of the sea.⁴⁸

The fourth unexpected factor was the inevitable spread of revolution to Spain itself in 1820. Spain was redefining itself, motivated in part by the liberal aims of the French and American Revolutions and a conscious rejection of royal absolutist power, being increasingly unsupportive of a repugnant South American policy it could no longer support financially or morally. The Spanish uprising spread throughout most military possessions in Spain that spring of 1820, fueled by a deteriorating economy that lagged far behind England's and the rest of postwar Europe. The king soon had to rewrite the constitution and withdraw financial support of many military activities overseas.

Finally, Bolívar's three-year military campaign against Peru's stubborn, resistant royalist forces, especially in the north, may also have failed without the splendid efforts of General Antonio José de Sucre. Winning one cavalry-charged battle after another, reminiscent of the brilliance of Marshal Ney, Sucre and his patriot army went on to defeat the Peruvian royalists at the key Battle of Ayacucho in December 1824—the last battle fought by Spanish military power in South America.

Now firmly and finally in command of all "El Dorado," in August 1825 Bolívar divided the eastern or upper region of Peru to form Bolivia (named in his honor), called for the end of slavery, proclaimed religious liberty, and established a new constitution with a president or chief executive and three chambers of congress. Sucre became the first president of Bolivia, and Bolívar of Peru. In 1827 Bolívar, acting with virtual dictatorial authority, drafted the Peruvian constitution along much the same lines as that of Bolivia's and Venezuela's. Bolívar's constitutions and government were patterned more along the British model, with a strong and highly centralized government, and less on that of the United States, which vested considerable power in the legislature and in the states. Although he was not a monarchist, Bolívar preferred a very strong executive unfettered by congressional authority.⁴⁹



José de San Martín, by unknown artist (1827 or 1829).

48. Robertson, *Rise of the Spanish-American Republic*, 213–14. For a comprehensive new study, see Harvey, *Cochrane*.

49. Rodríguez, *Independence of Spanish America*, 190.

Now in a position to wield absolute power, Bolívar was an unwilling dictator. In Peru as in Venezuela and elsewhere, he occupied the chair of first president only temporarily and was content to relinquish supreme political control as soon as possible. The thought of becoming a king or emperor, à la Napoléon, was antithetical to his native republican and egalitarian instincts. He respected the rule of law and the voice of the people. However, he admittedly preferred a strong, almost absolutist executive, a weaker legislature, and a more limited form of democracy.

Ironically, despite his deep desire for social reform, his new republics failed to ensure the abolition of slavery and a true equality among all peoples, which were ever his ambitions. “Nothing is nearer to the condition of beasts,” he once declared, “than to view free men everywhere and not be free. Men in this position are the enemies of society, and, if large in number, they are dangerous. . . . It is, therefore, borne out by the mission of politics and derived from the examples of history that any free government which commits the folly of maintaining slavery is repaid with rebellion and sometimes with collapse.”⁵⁰

To Bolívar’s way of thinking, it was “madness that a revolution for liberty should try to maintain slavery.”⁵¹ However, there still existed far too many vested economic interests, too many long-entrenched racial prejudices for Bolívar’s egalitarian aims to be secured so quickly. Abolished on paper, slavery endured for at least another fifty years as forced servile labor.

If Bolívar failed to eliminate slavery, his other major disappointment was the lost dream of Spanish-American unification. “We have indeed driven out our oppressors, smashed the tablets of their tyrannical laws, and established legitimate institutions,” he wrote in an 1822 letter to General Bernardo O’Higgins, revolutionary leader in Chile: “But we have yet to lay the foundation of the pact of union that will make of this part of the world a nation of republics. . . . The union of the five great states of America is itself so sublime that I do not doubt but that it will come to be the cause of amazement in Europe. . . . Who shall oppose an America united in heart, subject to one law, and guided by the torch of liberty?”⁵²

Without the creation of a colossus of South American power into a single national body, as George Washington had done in North America, Latin America would never stand up or be equal to the other great world powers, nor successfully stifle divisions from within. “Unless we centralize our American governments, our enemies will gain every advantage,” Bolívar had said years before. “We will inevitably be involved in the horrors of civil strife and [be] miserably defeated by that handful of bandits who infest our territories.”⁵³

By 1828 the Liberator of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and finally Peru had arrived at the reluctant conclusion that such a plan of unity was impossible. The forces of

50. Bolívar to General Francisco de Paula Santander, 20 April 1820, in *Selected Writings*, item 85, 1:223.

51. Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 151.

52. Bolívar to General Bernardo O’Higgins, 8 January 1822, in *Selected Writings*, item 124, 1:289.

53. “Memorial to the Citizens of New Granada by a Citizen of Caracas,” 15 December 1812, in *Selected Writings*, item 9, 1:22.

separation; the immense and varied geographies that were barriers to travel and easy communication; the racial, social, and economic divides; the weak central governments; and the strong suspicions, if not hatreds, among classes, tribes, and even nations all proved too resistant in the long run to coalition and unification. "I am ashamed to admit it," Bolívar said to the Congress of Colombia, "but independence is the only benefit we have gained, at the cost of everything else."⁵⁴

Bolívar's final years proved difficult and disappointing. He was finally getting weary of serving and of having his mind in constant turmoil. "Not even success can induce me to bear the burden any longer. . . . You cannot imagine how I long for rest."⁵⁵ He barely survived an assassination attempt in Peru, thanks to his lover, Manuela, who shot and killed the intruder. Sucre, his loyal lieutenant, was murdered. Small and intermittent insurrections continued to break out here and there. Beginning in 1828, Bolívar contracted tuberculosis, and seven months after stepping down as president of Colombia, Bolívar died at Santa Marta on 17 December 1830. He was forty-seven.

If one of the prevailing themes of this book has been that of liberation, freedom, and wars of independence, then surely the political history of South America fits that pattern. And in the rest of Latin America, the same liberating forces discussed above were simultaneously at work nearly everywhere. As shown, Bolívar was certainly not alone in pursuing the dream of South American freedoms. Argentina gained its independence in 1820. That same year, Brazil finally threw off centuries of Portuguese monarchical rule in a revolution of its own that Lisbon reluctantly recognized five years later. After years of fighting, Agustín de Iturbide successfully declared Mexico a free and independent state in 1821, with Guatemala doing the same. Uruguay accomplished its independence in 1828. And the list goes on.

Yet of all those men and movements, few if any equaled Bolívar, although he would not have said so. "In the midst of that sea of troubles, I was but a mere plaything in the hurricane of revolution that tossed me about like so much straw. I could do neither good nor evil. Irresistible forces directed the course of our events. To attribute these forces to me would not be just, for it would place upon me an importance that I do not merit."⁵⁶

Nevertheless, he was, as San Martín called him, "the most extraordinary personage that South America has produced."⁵⁷ As a military commander, he was surpassed by few for his prowess, his self-confidence, and his bravery and skill on the battlefield. He defied overwhelming odds and intimidating mountain ranges. Like America's George Washington, he learned how to retreat strategically and regroup successfully. In the process, he brought independence to almost all northern South America and brought glory to himself. He

54. "Message to the Constituent Congress of the Republic of Colombia," 20 January 1830, in *Proclamas y Discursus del Libertador*, 298, as cited in Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 212.

55. Bolívar to General Francisco de Paula Santander, 9 February 1825, item 206, in *Selected Writings*, 2:468.

56. "Address Delivered at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela in Angostura," 15 February 1819, in *Selected Writings*, item 70, 1:173–74.

57. Robertson, *Rise of the Spanish-American Republic*, 312.

established new constitutions, governments, and republics and worked hard at abolishing slavery and ensuring the rights of the individual. If neither a dictator nor an emperor, he was a controlling liberator who tended toward imperialism and favored strong executive powers in all his new nations. Although he failed to establish a unity of South American states, he was acclaimed father of their independence and the inspiration for democracy, equality, and the dignity of human rights.

Bolívar was to South America what Napoléon had been to Europe. He despised the hated and corrupt Spanish rule that had terrorized much of the continent for almost three hundred years. He tried to tear down slavery wherever he found it, established new constitutions, reduced the powers of the Catholic clergy, and created an independence movement that set many South American nations on a path of self-rule. His accomplishments also made possible modern freedom of religion in many parts of the continent, paving the way for the astonishing spread of evangelicalism, Pentacostalism, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and other religions in the latter half of the twentieth century. Without Bolívar and the liberties he promoted over the ensconced political and ecclesiastical powers of his day, modern religious freedoms in South America might never have come to pass.