

**El Libertador:
Writings of Simón
Bolívar**

*DAVID BUSHNELL,
Editor*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

EL LIBERTADOR

Writings of Simón Bolívar

LIBRARY OF LATIN AMERICA

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Writings of Simón Bolívar

Translated from the Spanish by

FREDERICK H. FORNOFF

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY DAVID BUSHNELL

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2003

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

<http://www.oup.com>

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Bolívar, Simón, 1783–1830.
[Selections. English]

El Libertador : writings of Simón Bolívar/
translated from the Spanish by Frederick H. Fornoff ;
edited with an introduction and notes by David Bushnell.

p. cm. — (Library of Latin America)
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-19-514481-3 (pbk.) — ISBN 0-19-514480-5 (cloth)

1. South America—History—Wars of Independence, 1806–1830—Sources.
2. Latin America—History—Wars of Independence, 1806–1830—Sources.
- I. Fornoff, Frederick H. II. Bushnell, David, 1923– III. Title. IV. Series.

F2235.3 .A5 2003
980'.02'092—dc21
2002011540

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

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Series Editors'
General Introduction

The Library of Latin America series makes available in translation major nineteenth-century authors whose work has been neglected in the English-speaking world. The titles for the translations from the Spanish and Portuguese were suggested by an editorial committee that included Jean Franco (general editor responsible for works in Spanish), Richard Graham (series editor responsible for works in Portuguese), Tulio Halperín Donghi (at the University of California, Berkeley), Iván Jaksic (at the University of Notre Dame), Naomi Lindstrom (at the University of Texas at Austin), Eduardo Lozano of the Library at the University of Pittsburgh, and Francine Masiello (at the University of California, Berkeley). The late Antonio Cornejo Polar of the University of California, Berkeley, was also one of the founding members of the committee. The translations have been funded thanks to the generosity of the Lapidia Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

During the period of national formation between 1810 and into the early years of the twentieth century, the new nations of Latin America fashioned their identities, drew up constitutions, engaged in bitter struggles over territory, and debated questions of education, government, ethnicity, and culture. This was a unique period unlike the process of nation formation in Europe and one that should be more familiar than it is to students of comparative politics, history, and literature.

The image of the nation was envisioned by the lettered classes—a

minority in countries in which indigenous, mestizo, black, or mulatto peasants and slaves predominated—although there were also alternative nationalisms at the grassroots level. The cultural elite were well educated in European thought and letters, but as statesmen, journalists, poets, and academics, they confronted the problem of the racial and linguistic heterogeneity of the continent and the difficulties of integrating the population into a modern nation-state. Some of the writers whose works will be translated in the Library of Latin America series played leading roles in politics. Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, a friar who translated Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and was one of the most colorful characters of the independence period, was faced with imprisonment and expulsion from Mexico for his heterodox beliefs; on his return, after independence, he was elected to the congress. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, exiled from his native Argentina under the dictatorship of Rosas, wrote *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie*, a stinging denunciation of that government. He returned after Rosas' overthrow and was elected president in 1868. Andrés Bello was born in Venezuela, lived in London, where he published poetry during the independence period, settled in Chile, where he founded the University, wrote his grammar of the Spanish language, and drew up the country's legal code.

These post-independence intelligentsia were not simply dreaming castles in the air, but vitally contributed to the founding of nations and the shaping of culture. The advantage of hindsight may make us aware of problems they themselves did not foresee, but this should not affect our assessment of their truly astonishing energies and achievements. It is still surprising that the writing of Andrés Bello, who contributed fundamental works to so many different fields, has never been translated into English. Although there is a recent translation of Sarmiento's celebrated *Facundo*, there is no translation of his memoirs, *Recuerdos de provincia* (*Provincial Recollections*). The predominance of memoirs in the Library of Latin America series is no accident—many of these offer entertaining insights into a vast and complex continent.

Nor have we neglected the novel. The series includes new translations of the outstanding Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis' work, including *Dom Casmurro* and *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. There is no reason why other novels and writers who are not so well known outside Latin America—the Peruvian novelist Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido*, Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, José de Alencar's *Iracema*, Juana Manuela Gorriti's short stories—should not be read with as much interest as the political novels of Anthony Trollope.

A series on nineteenth-century Latin America cannot, however, be limited to literary genres such as the novel, the poem, and the short story. The literature of independent Latin America was eclectic and strongly influenced by the periodical press newly liberated from scrutiny by colonial authorities and the Inquisition. Newspapers were miscellanies of fiction, essays, poems, and translations from all manner of European writing. The novels written on the eve of Mexican Independence by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi included disquisitions on secular education and law, and denunciations of the evils of gaming and idleness. Other works, such as a well-known poem by Andrés Bello, "Ode to Tropical Agriculture," and novels such as *Amalia* by José Mármol and the Bolivian Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, were openly partisan. By the end of the century, sophisticated scholars were beginning to address the history of their countries, as did João Capistrano de Abreu in his *Capítulos de história colonial*.

It is often in memoirs such as those by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier or Sarmiento that we find the descriptions of everyday life that in Europe were incorporated into the realist novel. Latin American literature at this time was seen largely as a pedagogical tool, a "light" alternative to speeches, sermons, and philosophical tracts—though, in fact, especially in the early part of the century, even the readership for novels was quite small because of the high rate of illiteracy. Nevertheless, the vigorous orally transmitted culture of the gaucho and the urban underclasses became the linguistic repertoire of some of the most interesting nineteenth-century writers—most notably José Hernández, author of the "gauchesque" poem "Martín Fierro," which enjoyed an unparalleled popularity. But for many writers the task was not to appropriate popular language but to civilize, and their literary works were strongly influenced by the high style of political oratory.

The editorial committee has not attempted to limit its selection to the better-known writers such as Machado de Assis; it has also selected many works that have never appeared in translation or writers whose work has not been translated recently. The series now makes these works available to the English-speaking public.

Because of the preferences of funding organizations, the series initially focuses on writing from Brazil, the Southern Cone, the Andean region, and Mexico. Each of our editions will have an introduction that places the work in its appropriate context and includes explanatory notes.

We owe special thanks to the late Robert Glynn of the Lampadia Foundation, whose initiative gave the project a jump start, and to Richard

Ekman of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which also generously supported the project. We also thank the Rockefeller Foundation for funding the 1996 symposium "Culture and Nation in Iberoamerica," organized by the editorial board of the Library of Latin America. We received substantial institutional support and personal encouragement from the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin. The support of Edward Barry of Oxford University Press has been crucial, as has the advice and help of Ellen Chodosh of Oxford University Press. The first volumes of the series were published after the untimely death, on July 3, 1997, of Maria C. Bulle, who, as an associate of the Lampadia Foundation, supported the idea from its beginning.

—*Jean Franco*
—*Richard Graham*

Chronology of Simón Bolívar

- 1783 24 July. Simón Bolívar is born at Caracas, the youngest of two brothers and two sisters.
- 1786 Death of his father, Juan Vicente Bolívar y Ponte, wealthy creole planter and militia colonel and heir to the title of marquis of San Luis, although he never used it.
- 1792 Death of his mother, María de la Concepción Palacios y Blanco, whose family also formed part of the colonial aristocracy. Primary responsibility for Simón's upbringing passes to a maternal uncle, Esteban Palacios, but as he is living in Spain, it is exercised in practice by another uncle, Carlos Palacios.
- 1795 Bolívar goes to live in the house of Simón Rodríguez, the most influential of his teachers.
- 1798 Bolívar is commissioned *subteniente* in the colonial militia.
- 1799–1802 Bolívar's first visit to Europe. He stays principally in Spain but makes an excursion to France early in 1802.

- 1802 26 May. In Madrid, Bolívar marries María Teresa Rodríguez del Toro, daughter of a noble family of Caracas. Shortly afterward, the couple returns to Venezuela.
- 1803 22 January. Death of Bolívar's wife.
- 1803–1806 Bolívar's second stay in Europe. He travels more widely but spends most of his time in Paris, where he meets Alexander von Humboldt and other notables and renews his acquaintance with Simón Rodríguez.
- 1805 15 August. Accompanied by Rodríguez, Bolívar makes a vow at Rome to liberate Spanish America.
- 1807 1 January (apparently). Bolívar lands in Charleston, South Carolina, on his return from Europe. He visits other major cities before finally sailing from Philadelphia back to Venezuela.
- 1807–1810 Living in Venezuela and occupied with agricultural and commercial activities, Bolívar takes part, as still a relatively minor figure, in the revolutionary ferment that arose in Spanish America following the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the overthrow of the legitimate monarch, Fernando VII.
- 1810 On 19 April Caracas revolutionists depose the Spanish captain-general and establish a junta to govern ostensibly in the name of Fernando VII, but in practice autonomous. The junta names Bolívar commissioner to London to seek the sympathy and support of Great Britain for the new regime.
- 1811 On 5 July an elected Venezuelan congress formally declares independence. Shortly afterward, Bolívar receives his baptism of fire in the campaign to suppress a counterrevolutionary outbreak at Valencia.
- 1812 Bolívar helps to rally a demoralized populace after the disastrous Holy Thursday earthquake in Caracas, but on 6 July he is forced to evacuate the strategic position of Puerto Cabello, which had been entrusted to his command. On 31 July, embittered at the surrender agreed to by Francisco de Miranda as dictator of Venezuela's "First Republic," Bolívar is one of the leaders who arrest him and thereby prevent his escape from Venezuela. Bolívar

- subsequently goes to Cartagena in New Granada to resume the struggle and on 15 December issues the Cartagena Manifesto, his first major political text.
- 1813 With backing from the revolutionary government of New Granada, Bolívar conducts the “Admirable Campaign,” which again delivers most of Venezuela into patriot hands.
- 1814 The “Second Republic,” in which Bolívar held supreme civil and military power, proves unable to gain wide popular backing and is defeated, in large part by the action of royalist irregulars.
- 1814–1815 Again a fugitive in New Granada, Bolívar helps the federal authorities subdue the recalcitrant state of Cundinamarca (Bogotá), but in the face of continuing internal dissensions he withdraws to the West Indies, where on 6 September 1815 he publishes the Jamaica Letter.
- 1816 With help from Haiti, Bolívar in the second of two attempts reestablishes a foothold in Venezuela. At Carúpano on 2 June he issues his first decree against slavery.
- 1817 Bolívar establishes a provisional government at Angostura on the lower Orinoco River.
- 1818 Bolívar joins forces with the chief of Venezuela’s *llaneros* (plainsmen), José Antonio Páez, and with him consolidates control over much of the interior Orinoco Basin.
- 1819 On 15 February at Angostura, Bolívar inaugurates a new Venezuelan congress and delivers another of his key political statements, the Angostura Address. Later in the year he launches a campaign for the liberation of New Granada, crowned with success at the Battle of Boyacá (7 August). On 17 December the Congress of Angostura votes to establish the Republic of Colombia, comprising both Venezuela and New Granada as well as Quito (modern Ecuador).
- 1821 24 June. Bolívar defeats royalist forces in the Battle of Carabobo, the last major engagement of the war in Venezuela. The Colombian constituent congress, meeting at Cúcuta, adopts a formal constitution and elects Bolívar first president to serve under it, with Francisco de

- Paula Santander as vice president. Santander is left as acting chief executive in Bogotá, the national capital, when Bolívar leaves to continue directing the military struggle against Spain.
- 1822 The Battle of Pichincha on 24 May, won by Bolívar's lieutenant, Antonio José de Sucre, seals the liberation of Ecuador and paves the way for Bolívar's entry to Quito three weeks later. On 26–27 July, at Guayaquil, Bolívar meets the Argentine Liberator, José de San Martín, and fails to reach agreement on plans for completing the liberation of Peru or on the future political order of Spanish America.
- 1823 1 September. At the invitation of Peruvian authorities, Bolívar lands in Callao to assume leadership of the independence struggle in Peru.
- 1824 On 6 August, at the Battle of Junín, Bolívar scores a major victory in the Peruvian highlands. On 7 December, from Lima, Bolívar invites other Spanish American nations to a conference at Panama City for the purpose of creating a permanent alliance. Two days later, in the Battle of Ayacucho, Sucre defeats the Peruvian viceroy and for all practical purposes completes the war of independence in Spanish South America.
- 1825 The former territory of Upper Peru, where royalist resistance crumbled before the advance of Sucre following the Battle of Ayacucho, takes the name of Bolivia and invites Bolívar, who proceeded there from Lima, to write its first constitution.
- 1826 On 25 May Bolívar submits his draft constitution for Bolivia. Its central feature is a president serving for life. In June–July the Congress of Panama meets but fails to produce lasting results. On 3 September Bolívar finally leaves Peru to return to Colombia.
- 1827 Bolívar makes a peaceful arrangement with Páez to end the revolt that he had begun in Venezuela the year before. However, he is increasingly estranged from Vice President Santander and the liberals of New Granada, who object both to his leniency toward Páez and to the seeming

betrayal of republican principles in his constitution for Bolivia.

- 1828 Failure of the Convention of Ocaña, called to reform the Colombian constitution, leads Bolívar to establish a conservative military dictatorship in a desperate attempt to maintain internal stability and, if possible, the unity of Colombia. On 25 September he survives an assassination attempt in Bogotá; believing Santander responsible, even in the absence of clear-cut proof, he sends the former vice president into exile.
- 1829 While Bolívar is in Ecuador, primarily to deal with a conflict between Colombia and Peru, a monarchist scheme floated by his supporters in Bogotá arouses widespread hostility, especially in Venezuela.
- 1830 Faced with the secession of Venezuela from the Colombian union and the unrelenting opposition of New Granadan liberals, Bolívar resigns the presidency and on 8 May leaves Bogotá, intending to go into foreign exile. However, he dies on 17 December at Santa Marta on the coast.

An Overview of the Bolivarian Sources

The extant private and official writings of Simón Bolívar are voluminous, and virtually all have found their way into print, but new items of generally minor significance still turn up from time to time.¹ Bolívar conscientiously accumulated an archive that eventually filled ten trunks; it included messages received, copybooks of outgoing orders and messages, and other items as well. In his will, he gave instructions that this archive be burned, but at the time of his death it was already on its way to Jamaica in the care of a trusted friend, the Frenchman Jean Pavageau. There the documents were ultimately divided into three sections. Most of the papers relating to the years 1813–18 were sent to Pedro Briceño Méndez, a close military collaborator of Bolívar who proposed to write a history of the period in question; those from 1819 to 1830 were mainly consigned to Bolívar's former aide, Daniel F. O'Leary, who intended to write the history of the later period; and the remainder stayed with Juan de Francisco Martín, a New Granadan who had been a fervent civilian supporter of Bolívar and was one of his executors.²

The portions of Bolívar's archive consigned to Briceño Méndez and O'Leary would become the nuclei of two major printed compilations that appeared in Venezuela in the second half of the nineteenth century, in combination with other documents collected by the two original cus-

todians and others who collaborated in or continued their work. The papers kept by Juan de Francisco Martín ended up in Paris, where he lived for many years, part of the time in diplomatic service. They returned to Venezuela in the early twentieth century and along with the other two sections of Bolívar's archive and much else of related significance became part of the present Archivo del Libertador, located in the Casa Natal in Caracas. This repository, whose principal creator was the indefatigable Bolivarianist Vicente Lecuna, contains the most important collection anywhere in the world of documents generated by or concerned in some way with Simón Bolívar. It was directed by Lecuna himself until his death in 1954 and over the years has been steadily enriched through further acquisitions. But it is not, of course, the only archive holding Bolivarian materials, whether in Venezuela or in other countries. No doubt the most important of the other repositories is Colombia's Archivo Histórico Nacional in Bogotá, although the Fundación John Boulton in Caracas microfilmed most of its documents of Bolivarian interest, which can thus be consulted—in that form—at the office of the Fundación in the Venezuelan capital.³

Even though there is still much material relating to Bolívar and his associates that has not been published, there can be little surviving documentation signed or dictated by Bolívar himself that has not appeared in print. Indeed, most of his major texts and many lesser ones were quickly circulated in printed form in the press of the period or in pamphlet form. Not only that, but in his own lifetime a first multivolume compilation of Bolivarian materials had already been published by the Venezuelan patriots Francisco Javier Yanes and Cristóbal Mendoza, under the title *Colección de documentos relativos a la vida pública del Libertador de Colombia y del Perú, Simón Bolívar para servir a la historia de la Independencia de Sur América*. It comprised twenty-two small volumes, printed in Caracas from 1826 to 1829, with an appendix volume appearing in 1833. This was, in the words of Manuel Pérez Vila, "the point of departure" for all subsequent collections of documents concerning independence of the Bolivarian nations.⁴ In the second half of the century, two more major compilations were added. The first of these, compiled by the patriot warrior-priest José Félix Blanco and Ramón Azpurúa, was published in Caracas in 1875 as *Documentos para la historia de la vida pública del Libertador de Colombia, Perú y Bolivia*, in fourteen large volumes of double-column format. Its nucleus was the part of Bolívar's original archive that had been given to Briceño Méndez, but it incorporated other documents already included in the Yanes-Mendoza series,

and still others gathered by the two compilers (of whom Blanco had died before the collection appeared).⁵ The other was the misleadingly titled but even more important *Memorias del General O'Leary*, published from 1879 to 1888. In this case, of course, the nucleus of the collection was the part of the Liberator's own archive entrusted to Daniel F. O'Leary. He had died in 1854, but his son Simón Bolívar O'Leary took responsibility for the publication. Two of the volumes contained the actual memoirs ("Narración") of Bolívar's Irish-born aide and confidant; the rest were filled with the supporting documents, naturally including many that had been added to what O'Leary initially received.⁶ There are some errors and omissions in the Blanco and Azpurúa compilation and that of O'Leary, but they remain essential resources for all scholars studying the independence period and have both been reprinted in recent years.⁷

Although the work of those nineteenth-century compilers was certainly admirable, the most eminent of all collectors and publishers of Bolivarian materials was without question Vicente Lecuna, who worked mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. Lecuna produced a steady stream of compilations of Bolívar's own writings and related documents as well as original research and syntheses on all aspects of the Liberator's career. He was at the same time the most learned and most active guardian of Venezuela's Bolívar cult, as can be seen from the title itself of just one of his many works: *Catálogo de errores y calumnias en la historia de Bolívar* (3 vols., New York, 1956–58). In 1929–30, Lecuna brought forth a definitive collection of Bolívar's letters, the ten-volume series *Cartas del Libertador*, which included (and when necessary corrected) all those previously published and added some more, along with an analytical index. In 1947 he produced an eleventh volume, published in New York, as addendum to the series, and a twelfth was added in 1959 by the Fundación John Boulton. Lecuna also published, among much else, a two-volume *Documentos referentes a la creación de Bolivia* (1924) that includes Bolívar's draft of a constitution for Bolivia as well as other materials related to the beginnings of the country that bore his name.⁸

Not least, we have Lecuna to thank for the *Obras completas* of Bolívar published initially in 1947 in two volumes, by Editorial Lex of Havana, Cuba, though by order of the Venezuelan government. A three-volume set of the same was also published in Havana in 1950 and later reprinted in Caracas, in an undated edition but about 1963.⁹ It was reprinted one more time in 1984, in six volumes and in Spain, but still conserving Lecuna's original text.¹⁰ The two three-volume editions—Havana 1950 and Caracas 1963(?)—are the most widely available. Fortunately, they have

identical pagination and will be the version cited in the present work. The *Obras completas* were not, of course, truly *completas*. Quite apart from the failure to include items that came to light after the initial publication, they do not include, for example, something as essential for the study of Bolívar's career as his Bolivian constitution or all the decrees that he issued over the years. Fortunately, however, there is no lack of other places to find the text of the constitution,¹¹ and the *Decretos del Libertador, 1813–1830*, were published in 1961 by the Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela.

The *Obras completas* continue to be the single most convenient and accessible compilation, but for purposes of academic research it is being superseded by the *Escritos del Libertador*, launched in 1964 by the Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela. The latter series not only includes items newly come to light but gives more detailed information on provenance, prior publication, and differing versions of the documents, along with introductory essays and research aids prepared by such qualified specialists as Pérez Vila, whose general survey of the source materials appears at the front of the first volume. Pérez Vila was the driving force behind the publication project until the time of his death in 1991. Unfortunately, by century's end the series still had not been completed.¹²

Needless to say, there are also many compilations of Bolívar's writings that do not even pretend to be complete but present instead a selection either of those concerning a particular topic or of whatever the compilers considered most important. Two that deserve mention here are *Doctrina del Libertador*, published in Venezuela in 1976 under the editorship of Pérez Vila, which is notable for the quantity and quality of its explanatory notes,¹³ and the two-volume *Bolívar documental* compiled by the Venezuelan historian Germán Carrera Damas.¹⁴ Nor is there a lack of English-language compilations and anthologies. Of these much the most complete, in two volumes, is Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings*, compiled by Vicente Lecuna, and edited by Harold A. Bierck Jr. The set was published by the Banco de Venezuela (of which Lecuna was a director) in New York in 1951 and widely distributed to U.S. libraries and Latin American specialists.¹⁵ An example of the various shorter and more specialized compilations available is Gerald E. Fitzgerald, *The Political Thought of Bolívar: Selected Writings*.¹⁶ The present volume will, of course, include numerous items that have already appeared more than once in the English language, but it also contains some that have never before been translated, and the intent is to offer all the documents in a version that is contemporary and accurate.

NOTES

1. By far the most authoritative survey of the sources for the study of Bolívar is that by Manuel Pérez Vila, "Contribución a la bibliografía de los escritos del Libertador, manuscritos y ediciones," published in Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela, *Escritos del Libertador*, vol. I, *Introducción general* (Caracas, 1964-), 61-290. Except where otherwise specified, this note is based directly on that survey.

2. Pérez Vila, "Contribución," 63, 68-70.

3. *Ibid.*, 70-85, 257.

4. *Ibid.*, 160-61.

5. *Ibid.*, 187-91.

6. *Ibid.*, 224-27.

7. The Blanco and Azpurúa compilation was reprinted by the Comité Ejecutivo del Bicentenario de Simón Bolívar, Caracas, in 15 vols., 1977-79. The *Memorias del General O'Leary* were republished by the Ministerio de la Defensa in 34 vols. in 1981, the last two volumes containing the index to the entire collection; unfortunately, this edition was not widely distributed.

8. Pérez Vila, "Contribución," 231-43, 247-49.

9. *Ibid.*, 243-47.

10. Madrid: Maveco de Ediciones, 1984.

11. For example, in vol. 1 of *El pensamiento constitucional hispanoamericano hasta 1830* (Caracas, 1961; Biblioteca de la Academia Nacional de la Historia, 40), 171-221.

12. By 1996 the series had reached vol. 27, with documents of January-February 1824.

13. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976.

14. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1993.

15. The translation is by Lewis Bertrand; publisher was the Colonial Press.

16. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1971.

Translator's Note

In translating these political addresses, letters, manifestos, and decrees, I had two goals. First, I sought to reproduce the sense of Simón Bolívar's writings as accurately as possible. In this endeavor I must acknowledge the assistance of David Bushnell, editor of this volume, who selected the texts and coached me through numerous fine points of Spanish–American administrative and constitutional terminology. He also made available his earlier translation of extensive portions of Bolívar's draft of the constitution for Bolivia. For some of the pieces I was also able to consult the earlier translation by Lewis Bertrand in the two-volume *Selected Writings of Bolívar* (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), compiled by Vicente Lecuna and edited by Harold A. Bierck Jr. Bertrand's translation is quite accurate, if somewhat dated in tone.

My second task was to try to convey the stylistic spectrum of Bolívar's writing, which ranges from genteel prodding in letters to close friends and colleagues, fierce clarity in the political texts and manifestos, to lyric effusiveness in a piece such as his delirium on Chimborazo. In his letter to J. J. Olmedo, we sense his gratification at being the protagonist of an epic poem and his concern to reassure Olmedo of their friendship, even as he gently damns the poem with faint praise.

Given who he was and what he was working so hard to accomplish, it is inevitable that in all of these texts Bolívar's awareness of his own persona as a maker of history is always front and center. He is not so much egotistical as he is dedicated to his vision for America and aware of his own importance to that vision. By following Bolívar's writing from the turn of the century until his death in 1830, we can follow the shifts in his enthusiasm for his American project. What a difference in tone from "Oath Taken in Rome" (1805):

This nation [the nation of Romulus and Numa] has examples for everything, except for the cause of humanity: corrupt Messalinas, gutless Agrippas, great historians, distinguished naturalists, heroic warriors, rapacious consuls, unrestrained sybarites, golden virtues, and foul crimes; but for the emancipation of the spirit, the elimination of cares, the exaltation of man, and the final perfectibility of reason, little or nothing. The civilization blowing in from the East has shown all its faces here, all its parts; but the resolution of the great problem of man set free seems to have been something inconceivable, a mystery that would only be made clear in the New World.

I swear before you; I swear by the God of my fathers; I swear on their graves; I swear by my Country, that I will not rest body or soul until I have broken the chains binding us to the will of Spanish might!

to the near tragic resignation he voices in his last letter, addressed to General J. J. Flores (November 9, 1830):

Nations are like children, who soon throw away what they have wept to attain. Neither you nor I nor anyone else knows the will of the people. . . . Use the past to predict the future. You know that I have ruled for twenty years and derived from these only a few sure conclusions: (1) America is ungovernable for us; (2) Those who serve revolution plough the sea; (3) The only thing one can do in America is emigrate; (4) This country will fall inevitably into the hands of the unrestrained multitudes, and then into the hands of tyrants so insignificant they will be almost imperceptible, of all colors and races; (5) Once we've been eaten alive by every crime and extinguished by ferocity, the Europeans won't even bother to conquer us; (6) If it were possible for any part of the world to revert to primitive chaos, it would be America in her last hour.

The dispirited tone of this last letter serves as coda to the tragedy of the man known as the Liberator, and reflects a gradual shift of mood that is perhaps inevitable in a man who identified his persona with a continent full of people whose will he could not decipher.

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Introduction

With the possible exception of Fidel Castro, Simón Bolívar is by far the most widely known of Latin American historical figures. Books and articles written about him in his native region are very numerous, and works both translated and original abound in English and other major languages. Bolívar enjoys a degree of name recognition around the world even among people who have read none of the works concerning him or anything else that deals expressly with Latin America. Yet much of what people know or think they know about Bolívar is superficial or even erroneous. As Venezuelan historian Germán Carrera Damas shrewdly observed, the sheer accumulation of writings on Bolívar's life has served as much to obscure as to clarify his historical significance.¹

Part of the problem in understanding Bolívar is the sheer breadth of his thought and action. He was one of the few leaders of Latin American independence who remained fully engaged in the struggle from beginning to end, or more precisely from immediate antecedents to early aftermath. But he was more than just a soldier and founder of new nations, or "Liberator" to use his preferred title. He was a thinker who probed the meaning of what he was doing in historical perspective and in a wide international context. He analyzed past and present conditions of his part of the world and speculated, sometimes with uncanny prescience, con-

cerning its future. He drafted constitutions, orders, and decrees that he hoped would make that future more bearable. Amid all this, Bolívar found time to offer his ideas on questions of literary usage and educational method and a great deal more. Fortunately, his voluminous writings have been preserved, and the vigor of his prose style—almost always lucid even when presenting questionable theses, often trenchant or ironic, but never dull—must be included among his claims to fame.

From Caracas to Santa Marta

Bolívar may or may not have been sent to earth by Divine Providence, as his nineteenth-century biographer Felipe Larrazábal insisted,² but it is still fair to say that both the geographic locale and the social circumstances of his birth were propitious for his later emergence as the preeminent leader of Latin American independence. His life began in the year 1783 at Caracas, in Venezuela, which would be the first Spanish colony to gain *de facto* autonomy (1810) and also first to declare outright independence from the mother country (1811). Both distinctions were due in part to the geographic accident of being situated at the northeast extremity of Spanish South America. Of all the principal Spanish colonies, Venezuela was closest to Europe, and Caracas in particular, situated a mere day's journey from the Caribbean coast, was normally the first Spanish colonial capital to receive news from the other side of the Atlantic. Thus in 1810 Venezuelans had early notice of the fact that most of Spain had fallen under the control of Napoleon and his allies and that a new Spanish resistance government, the Council of Regency, had emerged—requiring Spanish Americans to decide either to recognize its authority or to strike out on their own, as Venezuela now did. But it was also the Spanish colony closest to the still-loyal West Indian territories of Cuba and Puerto Rico, so its fledgling revolutionary government was the one most directly exposed to counterrevolutionary attack and least able to maintain the fiction of an autonomous status short of actual separation from Spain.

Venezuela's economic role also prepared it to become a key player in the independence movement. It was an agroexporting region, with extensive slave-worked landholdings that made it, after Cuba, the most successful of Spain's plantation colonies. By far the principal commodity was cacao, grown in valleys and slopes of the Andean coastal range and in the narrow strip between that range and the Caribbean. On the eve of independence, cacao represented almost half the colony's exports, even