



World History

Simon Bolivar Reading

Name:

Section:

Simón Bolívar: The Liberator

Simon Bolivar's Background

Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar was born on July 24, 1783 in Caracas, Venezuela. His wealthy parents, don Juan Vicente Bolívar y Ponte and doña Maria de la Concepción Palacios y Blanco, died while he was still a boy. His father when Simón was two, and his mother when he was nine. Simón inherited a fortune and was left in the care of his uncle, don Carlos Palacios. Simón received an excellent education from tutors, and he became familiar with the works of the Enlightenment as well as those of classical Greece and Rome. At the age of fifteen, his uncle sent him to Spain to continue his education, as was customary for wealthy creoles at the time.

Simon left for Spain in 1799 with his friend, Esteban Escobar. On the way, he stopped in Mexico City where he met with the viceroy of New Spain whom he impressed and alarmed with his confident argument for Spanish American independence. Bolívar arrived in Madrid in June 1799 and stayed with his uncle, Esteban Palacios.

In Spain, Bolívar met Maria Teresa Rodríguez del Toro y Alaysa whom he married soon afterwards in 1802. A year later, Bolívar returned to Venezuela and took his new bride with him. Shortly after arriving, Maria Teresa became sick with yellow fever and died. Her death greatly affected Bolívar and he vowed never to marry again, a vow that he kept for the rest of his life. After losing his wife, Bolívar returned to Spain in 1804 to attempt to overcome his grief. While in Europe he witnessed the proclamation of Napoleon Bonaparte as Emperor of France and later the coronation of Napoleon as King of Italy and Milan. Bolívar lost respect for Napoleon whom he considered to have betrayed the republican ideals. The trip failed to cheer him up until he accidentally met up with his old tutor and friend, Simón Rodríguez, who was living in exile because of his radical notions. The two traveled through Europe together, and they talked of South America's future and their patriotic yearnings. It was during this trip that, while in Italy, Bolívar made his famous vow atop Mount Aventin of Rome to never rest until South America was free from Spanish rule. In 1807, Bolívar returned to Venezuela after a brief visit to the United States.



Latin America Begins its Fight for Independence

As the 18th century came to a close, the relationships between the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies and their respective colonies in the Americas had become strained by modernizing reforms, rebellion, and wars in Europe. The liberalization of the trade monopoly had created prosperity in most of the colonies, but the people living in those colonies did not benefit much from the prosperity. Instead, the money went to the Iberian monarchies and the wealthy Spanish landowners. Creoles in Latin America were also frustrated by their subordination to the Spaniards.

The anti-clerical regalism of reformers in both Portugal and Spain had eroded the traditional basis of the legitimacy of the Iberian Catholic monarchies, while in the ideas of the Enlightenment, potential alternatives to royal sovereignty could be found. The elite class in Latin America was faced with a decision between independence and continuing to live under monarchical rule. To make the decision, they had to weigh the benefits of political freedom against the risks of internal disorder and race war from which the monarchy could provide protection.

Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808 was the event that finally triggered the struggle for Latin America's independence from Spain. Napoleon invited Charles IV, the king of Spain, and his son and heir to the throne, Ferdinand, to Bayonne, France. Once there, Napoleon had them detained, and he delivered the crown of Spain to his own brother, Joseph. The people of Spain were not happy about this, and, starting in Madrid, they rose up in rebellion against the French troops. Juntas sprang up in various towns, and in the absence of the desired monarch, these councils assumed provisional sovereignty, eventually placing them under the authority of a Supreme Junta at Seville.

The installation of Joseph Bonaparte as king of Spain also produced crisis in the Americas. The Spanish colonies there were, strictly speaking, kingdoms in their own right, constitutionally distinct from Spain but sharing a common monarch. When the monarchy in Spain suddenly lost its legitimacy when Bonaparte took over, it became unclear who had authority over the Americas. One option was for the creoles to set up juntas in the same manner as in Spain and assume provisional sovereignty. This would be the first time in history the creoles could legitimately exercise power in America without either deferring to a viceroy or being disloyal to the king. This option was favored by the creoles who wanted to eventually move towards autonomy from Spain, but there were many creoles that would have preferred to stay loyal to the Spanish throne.

As the fighting continued in the Iberian peninsula, the course to be taken by the creoles in Spanish America remained unclear. Then in 1810, as Spanish resistance to Napoleon was about to collapse completely, creole patriots in Venezuela, New Granada, Argentina, and Chile rebelled and formed juntas similar to those formed in Spain.

Simón Bolívar as Liberator

Simon Bolívar returned to Venezuela from Spain in 1808. Soon afterwards, he joined and became a leader of the Patriotic Society of Caracas that was responsible for numerous revolts that ultimately resulted in independence. That occurred in April, 1810, when the colonial governor was deposed and a junta independent of Cádiz was established. Two months later, Bolívar was promoted to the rank of colonel in the militia and appointed head of a diplomatic mission to London.

This mission to London marked the beginning of Bolívar's twenty years career as a public servant on behalf of freedom and independence. Bolívar returned from London in June, 1811, and spoke to the Patriotic Society in favor of independence. On July 5, 1811, the Patriotic Society of Caracas declared independence and founded the first republic of Venezuela. The constitution for the new republic provided for a federal structure, the legal equality of citizens of all races, and the abolition of clerical and military privileges. Yet, in reality, it did little for non-whites: most were excluded from voting by a property qualification, slavery was retained, and the llaneros, the free-ranging horsemen of the plains, were alienated by policies designed to bring the llanos (plains) under private ownership. In March, 1812, a small Spanish force arrived from Puerto Rico, and the non-whites and royalists helped them combat the republican army. Within a few months the republican army had surrendered. Bolívar escaped to New Granada and avoided prison.

In New Granada, Bolívar enlisted the help of the United Provinces of New Granada for a renewed campaign against the royalists of Venezuela. In 1813, Bolívar reentered Venezuela and declared a "war to the death" against the authority of Spain. He did this with the intent of forcing undecided creoles to choose between independence and submission to unyielding colonialism. He reached Caracas in August and declared a second republic, assuming the role of military dictator. The Second Republic collapsed within a few months, however, because Bolívar had failed to win the support of the non-whites, many of whom were instead recruited to fight with those loyal to the king. After the defeat, Bolívar returned to New Granada, where he stayed shortly before going to Jamaica in 1815.

In 1814, Joseph Bonaparte had been removed from the Spanish throne, and Ferdinand VII had retaken his place there. In 1815, a Spanish army of 10,000 men was sent to the Indies with the intent of pacifying the area, and by 1816, both Venezuela and New Granada were back under royalist control. Now that the Spanish king had regained the throne from the French, the choice of the creoles was more difficult. Any opposition to the colonial administration could no longer be construed as anything but treason. The leaders of the radical minority realized that in order to gain the support of the majority of the creoles, they had to make their revolutionary ideas more appealing to their desires. It seemed that this would somehow require a monarchical solution.

Bolívar, an unwavering republican, even gave his independence program a marked conservative slant. After witnessing the anarchy in New Granada, he had determined that republicanism in South America could not follow the North American model. Bolívar believed that the South American societies had been kept in a condition of political immaturity through "Spanish tyranny", and, therefore, were unqualified to handle an electoral democracy. In his Jamaica Letter of September 6, 1815 he discussed his ideas for American independence, and he stated that South America should "not adopt the best system of government, but the one that is most likely to succeed." Bolívar, along with José de San Martín, decided that instead of direct

confrontation with royalist armies, seizing vulnerable territories and setting up an independent government there would be a more fruitful endeavor. By 1817, Bolívar and San Martín were each ready to undertake new campaigns for independence: San Martín in the south, and Bolívar in the north.

The Wars of Independence

In 1817 Simón Bolívar had returned to Venezuela to again fight for its independence. Starting his campaign in the west, Bolívar took the strategic town of Angostura. He established headquarters there and collected recruits and supplies. The location of Angostura on the Orinoco allowed him to receive assistance by sea as well as providing him with a route upriver into the central plains. This time in Venezuela, Bolívar gained the assistance of the llaneros, who had been conducting a guerrilla war against the royalists. To gain their cooperation, Bolívar provided certain limited incentives to the Indians and black slaves. This widened the ethnic base of the revolution, and it allowed Bolívar access to the central plains of Venezuela which proved to be very valuable in the fighting.

From time to time, Bolívar tried to gain a foothold in northern Venezuela, but without success. Then he came up with a more daring plan. He would cross the vast central plains and then the Andes Mountains during the rainy season and make a surprise attack on Bogotá. Bolívar began the long march on May 26, 1819, just as the rainy season started. The long trip across hundreds of miles of plains, swamps, and swollen rivers would prove to be at least as difficult as expected, but Bolívar would not be deterred. Many men died of hunger, disease, and exhaustion as they made their way across the plains. At the end of June, they began to climb the Andes. They were forced to cross at Pisba, 13,000 feet above sea level, because the lower passes were heavily guarded by royalist forces. None of their horses survived the mountain pass, and more than 1,000 men perished as well. But Bolívar and the rest marched on. On August 7, they encountered and routed the royalists' main forces at Boyacá. The patriots were considerably outnumbered, but they fought valiantly and won the decisive battle. The Spaniards and loyalists fled from Bogotá after their defeat at Boyacá, and on August 10, 1819, Bolívar occupied Bogotá.

The victory at Boyacá liberated New Granada, and in December the independence of all the provinces of the viceroyalty was declared and Gran Colombia (which encompasses present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador) was created with Simón Bolívar as president.

In June 1821, Bolívar won the battle of Carabobo, and when Caracas fell a few days later, Venezuela was finally completely free from Spanish rule. Bolívar next went south and conquered the province of Quito. On July 27, 1822, Simon Bolívar and José de San Martín met at the city of Guayaquil. Bolívar came in as the triumphant leader of a series of resounding military victories and the head of the vast new Gran Colombia. San Martín on the other hand was struggling with his campaign in Peru and his control in Chile was uncertain. Bolívar was in a far superior position, so after their secret discussions, San Martín left South America altogether and when to Europe. Bolívar's political victory over San Martín signified the demise of monarchism as an option for a post-independence settlement.

After the meeting with San Martín, Bolívar prepared to march across the Andes to Peru to fight the final offensive against the royalists. By the middle of 1824 he launched his campaign and won an important battle at Junín, which opened the door to Lima. Patriot forces also were victorious at Ayacucho, and Spain's presence in South America was eliminated. The wars of Independence in South America were concluded.

Bolívar After the Wars of Independence

From the end of the wars of independence in 1824 until his death in 1830, Simon Bolívar served as president of Venezuela. During the wars and until his death, Bolívar kept the company of Manuela Saenz, a mistress. During an attempted assassination of Bolívar, she played a large role in saving his life. The newly independent countries of South America did not operate perfectly and there was much turmoil. In 1830, Bolívar resigned as president because of the disunion and opposition that he felt in South America. He died on December 17, 1830.