

# Framing Revolution: Simón Bolívar's Rhetoric and Reason

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Boston College

Department of History

Framing Revolution: Simón Bolívar's Rhetoric and Reason

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis

By

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## Introduction: Framing a Revolution

The Spanish American revolutions occurred at a crucial juncture in western political history. While the French and American revolutions had provided early examples of Enlightenment-inspired revolution, this type of revolution had not been executed on a continental scale. The ideas propounded by Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and others that today validate western democratic governance were in their infancy; they existed largely as ideas, and not political realities, when Venezuelan rebels first declared independence in 1810.

For this reason and others, the Spanish American Revolution merits close study. As is widely known, it ended imperialist colonial Spanish rule and liberated a continent for the possibility of self-rule. Perhaps more importantly and most certainly less appreciated is the second substantial impact of the revolution. Through leading intellectuals like Simón Bolívar, the Spanish American revolution served as a testing ground for the promulgation and application of radical new Enlightenment ideals. In their quest for liberty, intellectuals championed ontological principles that not only helped win the revolution but also impacted post-war governance: tyranny ought to be subdued, political slavery ought to end, and revolution ought to serve all those united in brotherhood.

The manner in which South Americans framed and rationalized independence had longstanding implications, not only in that their rhetoric contributed to the revolutionary effort, but also in that it solidified Enlightenment political philosophy into a concrete reality. When Simón Bolívar calmed thousands of angry Black and Pardo soldiers, for example, by reminding them that “equality, liberty, and independence are our motto,” he solidified the importance of these previously theoretical principles in the revolution’s ethic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1* (Caracas: Banco de Venezuela), 90.

Focusing solely on the Bolivarian texts, this thesis will argue that a revolution has only as much impact as the rhetoric and justification that frames it. Without rhetoric and ideology, a revolution exists without a purpose and is little more than a series of violent acts. When revolutionaries attach real or symbolic significance to their actions and claim political justification for doing so, however, they harness their violence to serve a specific cause. For Simón Bolívar and the multitude of ethnic groups he addressed, this cause was not just independence from Spain, but the establishment of a non-tyrannical, liberty-preserving government for the people.

The Bolivarian texts provide the perfect lens with which to prove the importance of rhetoric in framing a revolution. Emerging as a central leader in independence following the 1812 fall of the first junta, Bolívar gave meaning to his military efforts with an extensive writing campaign. Understanding the divisions inherent to colonial Spanish America that threatened to derail his movement, Bolívar capitalized on every opportunity possible to write or speak to his brethren, reminding them of the reasons to stand united. The Bank of Venezuela in 1951 translated three volumes of the most famous Bolivarian speeches and letters into English, but this thesis also draws upon Spanish sources to provide a comprehensive depiction of Bolívar's independence vision.

As Chapters 1 and 2 will demonstrate, Bolívar justified independence in different ways according to his audience. Independence promised different realities to South America's multitude of ethnicities and interests, and Bolívar was cognizant to tailor his rhetoric according to the groups he addressed. When addressing the public, Bolívar favored a combination of metaphors and rhetorical devices. Most notably, he called on a slave metaphor to appeal to non-Creole constituencies, an Enlightenment-based understanding of tyranny and liberty to win the

Creole elite, and a blatant dehumanization of Spanish forces that everyone could rally behind. When writing letters, conversely, Bolívar capitalized on the opportunity to target his rhetoric to his specific audience, be it Creole leaders, British onlookers, or Church officials. Nonetheless, letters to Creole leaders stressed the need for unity and sacrifice, while correspondence to the British world played on British racialized stereotypes of the Spanish. Through this multilayered approach, Bolívar crafted a narrative that committed independence to many distinct realities and ensured the sustained revolutionary zeal of its many actors.

Before delving into Bolívar's public addresses and letters, a brief discussion of both the Enlightenment and Spanish American history will serve to contextualize the documents. Bolívar not only was influenced by European Enlightenment intellectuals, he also understood the extent to which educated Creoles within the colonies subscribed to Enlightenment principles of political virtue and liberty. Bolívar's rhetoric, then, existed not as words in a historical vacuum but as ideas in time that influenced the dominant intellectual space as much as they were influenced by others.

The Enlightenment, the dominant political-philosophical revolutions that many historians argue began from clerical objections to Catholic absolutism, eventually produced ideas that eventually led to anti-absolutist revolutions in North and South America, Haiti, and France.<sup>2</sup> John Locke was the first to condemn absolutism in his 1690 *Treatise on Government*. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, leading French intellectual Baron de Montesquieu had called for a system of checks and balances and had argued that laws be suited for the people for whom they are made.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most consistent with Simón Bolívar's thought, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* argued that true salvation awaited those that were instruments of political change, instead of

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<sup>2</sup>Margaret C.C. Jacobs, *The Enlightenment: A Brief History With Documents*, (London: Bedford/St. Martins 2001)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

simply discussing liberal ideas with the educated elite.<sup>4</sup> Both Rousseau and Montesquieu deliberated extensively on questions of liberty and tyranny, and Bolívar was known to travel with a copy of the *Social Contract*.<sup>5</sup>

Ideas spread through the Enlightenment world relatively easily, thanks to the creation of intellectual networks in mainland Europe. Specifically, the creation of Freemason grand lodges (of which Bolívar was a member), widespread translation of influential texts,<sup>6</sup> and growth of cities<sup>7</sup> allowed for the Enlightenment to reach a more global audience than any previous intellectual movement. These networks existed in the new world colonies as well; Creoles increasingly sought intellectual stimulation through discussion of leading political-philosophical treatises.<sup>8</sup>

Particularly relevant to placing Bolívar's writings into context is an understanding of the impact of correspondence in connecting thinkers throughout the European world. Letter writing became increasingly common in the eighteenth-century European world, with non-authors and non-intellectuals engaging in the practice increasingly. More so than traditional venues of discourse, letters enabled any literate individual in any area of the far-reaching corners of the Enlightenment world to connect with and debate other individuals, even those they had not previously met.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 2 will discuss Bolívar's letters in more detail, he extensively used

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning that historians have recently challenged the notion that the American understanding of the Enlightenment occurred as a part of the European Enlightenment. Instead, many argue that American authors during the Enlightenment period produced their own American Enlightenment to rival the European tradition. For more on this view, see Cañizares Esguerra "How to Write the History of the New World"

<sup>6</sup>The problem is that the translation process was messy; it was common for words and meanings to be misappropriated, and authors misunderstood. From: Withers, Charles W. J. *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> *Placing the Enlightenment*, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Letter-writing was a "way of demonstrating social standing and otherwise connect with people of similar interests." *Placing the Enlightenment*, 79.



letters as a means to connect with and exchange ideas with leaders throughout the American and European continents.

Despite the Spanish crown's attempt to ban radical texts (such as Rousseau's *Social Contract*), nineteenth-century Spanish America enjoyed a substantial population of wealthy, well-read Creoles. Bolívar's private tutor Simón Rodríguez encouraged Bolívar's skepticism and distrust of absolutism, in addition to introducing him to the works of many banned European thinkers. Many Creole youth (like Bolívar) were indoctrinated into Enlightenment thought by their private tutors. South American intellectuals such as Simón Rodríguez, Francisco de Miranda, and Bolívar himself interpreted radical Enlightenment ideals in such a way as to justify their objections to Spanish imperial policy.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, a longstanding rift between the Spanish crown and its subjugated Creole subjects had existed long before the introduction of Enlightenment principles. The introduction of Enlightenment ideas concerning liberty and tyranny, coupled with longstanding discontent with Spanish policy, produced "the equivalent of dynamite in Spain's New World Empire."<sup>11</sup> The mid-eighteenth century introduction and spread of Enlightenment thought coupled with Bourbon imperial policies provoked a compounding culture of dissent that culminated with Simón Bolívar's writings and revolution.

Yet even non-radicals and less-travelled Creoles began to take hold of Enlightenment principles and to make them their own. Leading Creoles dubbed Locke, Newton, and Rousseau "la verdadera filosofía" (the true philosophy) and promulgated their works throughout the

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald Briggs, *Tropes of Enlightenment in the Age of Bolivar: Simon Rodriguez and the American Essay at Revolution*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010) 79.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathon I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Natural Rights 1750-1790*, Oxford: Oxford Press, 2013, 508.

colonies.<sup>12</sup> Creating their own local Enlightenment and contributing to the trend of “radicalized Creole political consciousness,” Creoles slowly began to connect principles of liberty and tyranny with their century’s long objection to Spanish absolutism.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, authors began to predict an Enlightenment-based Creole uprising and overthrow of Spanish rule in widely circulated and banned books. Even Spanish officials noted Creole objection to “tyranny” and advocated for the prevention of “un fatal catastrafe.”<sup>14</sup>

By the 1780s, the international intellectual community had concluded that an Enlightenment-based Creole revolt in Spanish America was imminent. European observers pointed to tyrannical Spanish rule as justifying rebellion. The Tupac Amaru Indian rebellion of 1780, while neither Creole nor Enlightenment-based, encouraged revolutionary behavior and exhibited Spanish weakness. Francisco de Miranda, an avid reader and owner of an extensive book collection, further pushed his South American community towards independence by openly announcing plans for rebellion in 1784. Uprisings, revolts, and protests against the crown occurred commonly. This was the South America in which Bolívar grew up, one which took previous objections to Spanish rule and grouped them with Enlightenment radicalism to create momentum for independence.

Of course, the political and economic factors that encouraged revolution are vital to an understanding of independence. For those seeking an overview of the late-colonial political and economic climate, John Lynch’s *The Spanish American Revolutions 1808-1826* provides a great overview. This thesis, given its focus on the impact of rhetoric on revolution and sustaining social movements, will not devote extensive time delving into the political and economic causes for independence. While I will reference events in the independence movement, the timing of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 533.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 511.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 514.

events is secondary to the rhetorical importance of the moment. Instead, I will reference South American political and economic grievances only as they inform and contextualize the rhetoric that Bolívar employed to create and sustain momentum for his movement.

## Chapter 1: Proclamations and Speeches

Simón Bolívar's September 1814 address to the newly freed Venezuelan population provides a perfect introduction to his public rhetorical campaign. Bolívar, commonly referred to as "the Liberator" by those he freed, had just succeeded in retaking Venezuela from the Spanish in 1813. Understanding that he addressed a racially and socially fragmented Venezuelan population, the Liberator employed his three preferred public rhetorical devices. He played on Creole understandings of tyranny and liberty, alluded to slavery, and dehumanized the Spanish. Bolívar made sure to distinguish his "compatriots, [whose] virtues alone are capable of" winning the war, from the "multitude of madmen who do not understand their own interests and honors." Bolívar continued to contrast the South Americans and Spaniards, arguing that "freedom has never been subjugated by tyranny. Do not compare your physical forces with those of the enemy, because spirit and matter cannot be compared. You are men; they are beasts. You are free; they are slaves. Fight and you will win. God grants victory to the persevering."<sup>15</sup> Given the stark portrayal of the two groups, Bolívar simplified South American participation in the revolution into two diametrically opposed camps: Good and Evil. In so doing, Bolívar hoped South Americans would categorize themselves not as members of the greater Spanish empire, or as members of their racial class, but as compatriots and virtuous Venezuelans.

In order to sustain his war to the death against the Spaniards, Bolívar waged a war of words against the Spanish in the first seven years of the independence movement. By reminding Venezuelans in 1814 that "you are men, they are beasts" and "you are free, they are slaves," Bolívar framed the conflict to his liking. As Bolívar conquered extensive portions of Venezuela

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<sup>15</sup> Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1* (Caracas: Banco de Venezuela), 83.

and New Granada between 1812 and 1819, he adjusted his use of metaphor, symbolism, and other rhetorical language to match his audience and craft a nuanced independence narrative.<sup>16</sup>

Bolívar recognized the tremendous opportunity afforded him in his proclamations and speeches. He used his pulpit to conduct a massive publicity campaign against the Spanish in which he hoped to convince Creoles, Pardos, Mestizos, and all crucial populations of the common need to expel the Spanish. This campaign occurred in direct opposition to Spanish efforts, which featured a strategic alliance with the Catholic Church and extensive efforts to incite racial hatred against largely white Creole revolutionaries. As such, Bolívar's efforts to universalize independence for all Venezuela proved crucial to defeating the Spanish.

Using the opportunities afforded him at various speeches and through the creation of his revolutionary newspaper the *Correo del Orinoco*, he incorporated an array of passionate rhetorical devices and applied Enlightenment principles of freedom and liberty for the dual aim of quelling regionalism and fortifying resistance to Spanish rule.<sup>17</sup> This chapter will address the various means by which Bolívar framed the independence movement in such a way as to maximize its appeal and thereby sustain the movement. Because Bolívar understood that the first republic fell because "our division, not Spanish arms, returned us to slavery," he employed his writings and speeches to frame the revolution in such a way as to give it meaning to the widest possible audience and ensure its success.<sup>18</sup>

Historiography on the impact of Bolívar's public addresses has been limited. David

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<sup>16</sup> Bolívar continued to employ these rhetorical device in his September 1814 Manifiesto, arguing "Let your outcries be directed against those blind slaves who would fetter you with the chains that they themselves bear... Victory guided by justice has always been our aim even to the very ruin of the fair capital of Caracas, which we wrested from the hands of her oppressors." And "It is commendable, it is noble and sublime, to avenge Nature outraged by tyranny. Nothing can compare with the magnitude of such action, and even if desolation and death should be the reward of this glorious design, there would still be no reason to condemn it, because that which must be done is not readily accessible; yet, Justice compels us to act."

<sup>17</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 156.

<sup>18</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 22.

Bushnell notes the extent to which European classical tradition influenced his public addresses, but fails to consider how Bolivarian rhetoric represented a distinct intellectual effort.<sup>19</sup> John Lynch, in his portrait of the Liberator, recognized Bolívar's role in quelling caudillo regionalism and pointed to the certain texts: *Cartagena Manifesto*, *Jamaica Letter*, and *Angostura Address* as early national texts, but only in as much as they outlined Bolívar's political philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Lynch's analysis of the Bolivarian documents stops short of determining their real-time impact in rallying their respective audiences behind independence, focusing instead on the political implications behind the *Jamaica Letter* and *Angostura Address*. Through a close textual analysis of the major Bolivarian public addresses during the initial years of conquest and independence (1812-1819), this chapter will complement existing scholarship by demonstrating the impact of Bolivarian rhetoric in rallying multiple groups behind the cause for independence.

#### *The Cartagena Manifesto*, December 15, 1812

December 1812 marked a seminal moment not only for Bolívar but for his rhetorical campaign. Eager to begin military conquest after the failure of the first junta, Bolívar traveled to New Granada, which had yet to succumb to royalist rule. Bolívar delivered the Cartagena Manifesto before a highly divided New Granada. The region “had become a cauldron of discontent... on the verge of civil war.”<sup>21</sup> Despite their liberty, the citizens of Cartagena had succumbed to factionalism and resorted to violence, leaving the valuable port disunited and vulnerable to Spanish reconquest.<sup>22</sup> In this environment, Bolívar began his military career.

Impressed by the vigor of the Cartagena Manifesto, New Granadan President Manuel Rodríguez

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<sup>19</sup> David Bushnell and Lester D. Langley, eds., *Simón Bolívar: Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Liberator*, (London: Rowman & Little Field, 2008) xlii.

<sup>20</sup> John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar, A Life*, (New Haven: Yale, 2007), 84.

<sup>21</sup> Arana, *Marie Bolívar*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013),.

<sup>22</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolívar, A Life*, 65.

Torices appointed Bolívar to military command.<sup>23</sup> Cartagena, then, proved an early example of the success of Bolivarian rhetoric. Through his discussion of the failed Venezuelan junta (which failed due to disunity, Bolívar fittingly concluded), Bolívar solidified his command, began his military campaign, and convinced the New Granadans of the need for action.<sup>24</sup>

At the forefront of Bolívar's assault against Spanish rule in the Cartagena Manifesto was characterizing the New Granada-Spain relationship as akin to a slave with his master.<sup>25</sup> This metaphor, of Venezuelans as enslaved, grew to be a favorite of Bolívar's. Given the importance of slavery as an institution (slaves comprised 15% of the entire population in 1810), this metaphor hit home with the audience.<sup>26</sup> In the opening paragraphs of the Manifesto, Bolívar recalled that prior to the establishment of the first junta, "We were at a level even lower than servitude, and by that very reason hindered from elevating ourselves to the enjoyment of freedom."<sup>27</sup> All New Granadans, whether Creole, Black or Pardo, had long been subjected to servitude and uneven class relationships. To place their status at "lower than servitude" was to indicate the need for rebellion and liberty. Thus, while this metaphor was likely intended to win non-Creole support and to expel their Spanish enslavers, all New Granadans could appreciate the metaphor's relevance.<sup>28</sup>

As the Manifesto progressed, Bolívar further played out the slave metaphor: "People are slaves when the government, by its essence or through its vices, tramples and usurps the rights of

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<sup>23</sup> Bushnell, David, and Lester D Langley, eds. *Simón Bolívar: Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Liberator*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, countrymen is a problematic term to use, as no country existed in 1812. Moreover, Koenig (1994) points out that South American concepts of the nation developed gradually. Nonetheless, this essay will refer to any contemporary non-Spaniard as a countrymen, as said assumption was consistent with *Bolívar's* rhetoric.

<sup>25</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Winthrop R. Wright, *Café Con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 13.

the citizen or subject.”<sup>29</sup> Fortunately, both Creoles and non-Creoles could appreciate the extent to which Royalist government had enslaved them, according to the metaphor. Creoles had long decried decades of increasing economic and political Bourbon restrictions. Non-Creoles could point to more potent examples: numerous racially motivated laws stifled non-Creole economic, political, and marital liberties.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, that Spanish rule prevented civic participation and the extension of natural rights was not a highly contested point in 1812 New Granada.<sup>31</sup> By arguing that Spanish civic oppression resulted in New Granadan slave-like status, Bolívar not only reinforced the effective slave metaphor but also positioned independence as a force against an unpopular Spanish system of governance.

Bolívar’s final reference to slavery in the *Cartagena Manifiesto* created a lasting impression. “The Americans, within the Spanish system still in force,” Bolívar argued, “occupy no other place in society than that of servants suited for work, or, at best, that of simple consumers.”<sup>32</sup> Growing historical resentment at their unequal status with the peninsula left Spanish Americans increasingly resentful by 1810. Not only were South Americans disenfranchised and prevented from holding public office, eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms also solidified South America’s powerless status within the Spanish empire; they had become simple consumers and producers, unable to affect or influence the economy for which they worked. The message was clear: Spanish grievances extended beyond the political and the metaphorical and into the economic in what could have been an early capitalist economy. Given the opportunity to end this economic slavery, South Americans should do so.

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<sup>29</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> John Lynch, *The Spanish American revolutions 1808-1826*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 19.



In addition to the slave metaphor, the *Cartagena Manifesto* introduced a number of Bolívar's most common rhetorical arguments for independence. Bolívar consistently characterized the Spanish colonies as having a child-like dependency on Spain. In the *Cartagena Manifesto*, he pointed to Napoleon's 1808 invasion of Spain as breaking the child-like dependency on Spain, arguing that "when the French eagles swept over the peninsula... we were left orphaned."<sup>33</sup> Bolívar wasted little time determining the correct course of action for the newly "orphaned" colonies, arguing that because "the tie that bound [South America] to Spain is severed," "success will crown our efforts" and "the destiny of America is irrevocably fixed."<sup>34</sup> By employing the mother-metaphor, Bolívar connected himself with Baron de Montesquieu and other Enlightenment authors who similarly characterized European colonies as having a child-like dependency on mother nations. However, in contrast to contemporary authors, Bolívar wielded the mother metaphor to advance his own interest, instead justifying independence on the grounds that the mother relationship no longer applied.

As he expanded on South American justifications for independence, Bolívar took the opportunity to revisit the Spain-as-mother metaphor: "From the beginning we were plagued by a practice that in addition to depriving us of the rights to which we were entitled left us in a kind of permanent infancy with respect to public affairs."<sup>35</sup> This metaphor, then, enabled him to make a pointed contrast between the South American colonies and the newly free United States. Whereas colonists in North America had enjoyed comparatively great political representation, Spain's maternal neglect resulted in a permanent infancy for South America. In contrast to the

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<sup>33</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 19.

slave metaphor, this point would have resonated most strongly with the educated Creole elite, which viewed North American government and colonies as a model to emulate.<sup>36</sup>

Through the slavery and Spain-as-mother metaphors, then, Bolívar appealed to altogether distinct but powerful segments of New Granadan society. While the slave metaphor would have resonated with non-Creoles (particularly Pardos and slaves), Bolívar ensured Creole support for his appointment through demonstrating how Spain had treated its colonies like children. Taken together in the same manifesto, these metaphors created a nuanced rationale behind independence that garnered multi-ethnic support and thereby ensured sustained patriotic zeal.

Beyond the extensive use of metaphor, the *Cartagena Manifesto* marks the beginning of two additional Bolivarian rhetorical devices. By posing the rhetorical question, “To expect that a land so abundantly endowed, so extensive, rich, and populous should remain merely passive, is this not an outrage and a violation of the rights of humanity?”<sup>37</sup> Bolívar argued that Spanish colonial rule violated South American natural rights. This argument, grounded in Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* and consistent with contemporary Enlightenment natural rights philosophy, also likely resonated with educated Enlightenment-read Creoles.<sup>38</sup>

Later, through an additional rhetorical question, Bolívar wondered: “Is it possible that a newly liberated people can be launched into the sphere of freedom without their wings disintegrating and hurling them into the abyss, like Icarus?”<sup>39</sup> Yet again, Bolívar tailored his argument for a particularly powerful audience: educated Creoles. As most well educated Creoles would have known, Icarus and his father had escaped wrongful imprisonment from the absolutist King Minos of Crete. Like Icarus, natural order dictated that South America liberate itself from

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<sup>36</sup> Lynch, *The South American Revolutions, 1808-1826*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Lynch, *Simón Bolívar, A Life*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 23.

colonial rule. Bolívar's appeal to natural rights, then, demonstrates that he made a layered argument. Here, Bolívar appealed specifically to the educated Creole audience that held disproportionate decision-making authority through a classical reference.

Finally, urging fellow New Granadans to “repay the Spaniards’ torment for torment and to drown that race of exterminators in their own blood or in the sea” by liberating neighboring Venezuela, Bolívar employed heavy symbolism, which he revisited in subsequent speeches when he needed powerful imagery that appealed to a wide audience.<sup>40</sup> By referring to the Spaniards as “exterminators” and advocating drowning them in their own blood, Bolívar otherized Spain through dramatic symbolism. While this symbolism and the slavery metaphor resonated with all New Granadans (particularly non-Creoles), Bolívar's inclusion of the natural rights and Spain-as-mother metaphor demonstrated his ability to appeal to divergent classes in a single manifesto.

As a whole, the *Cartagena Manifesto* comprised an impressive and exhaustive rhetorical attack. Understanding its importance not only in reaching the varied and diverse New Granadan population but also as his introduction as an independence leader, Bolívar spared no metaphor or rhetorical device in his arsenal. Throughout the speech, Bolívar ensured the compliance of a multitude of demographics through what became his favorite rhetorical devices: slavery, Enlightenment-based commentary, and dehumanizing the Spanish.

*To the Sovereign Congress of New Granada, November 27, 1812*

Only two weeks separated from the *Cartagena Manifesto*, Bolívar addressed the New Granadan congress with the same goal of attaining military command of New Granadan troops. This speech, by contrast, occurred before a Creole audience. Thus, Bolívar narrowed his

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<sup>40</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 23; Here, the French Eagles refer to the Napoleonic troops that had invaded Spain. France's invasion provided the stimulus for South American colonies to claim independence.

rhetorical arsenal to match his largely educated, Creole audience. Knowing that he addressed a divided audience with hopes of convincing them of the need to liberate Caracas and greater Venezuela, Bolívar understood that he needed effective, audience-specific rhetoric. Given the factionalism present, the Congress was unlikely to agree on much, least of all liberating a neighboring province.<sup>41</sup> Thus, he selected Enlightenment natural rights symbolism as his primary tools to unify the divided congress and call for immediate, decisive action. Bolívar opened with the words:

These tyrants had scarcely taken possession of the fortified towns of Puerto Caballo, Caracas, and La Guaira, when, in open violation of the terms of capitulation and the rights of men, they placed in chains all citizens of merit and standing who had distinguished themselves in the Republic. With a lust for blood which seems to have outdone cruelty itself...<sup>42</sup>

Referring to the Spanish as tyrants, Bolívar also played on popular Creole resentment against tyranny. Widely read texts by Rousseau, Locke, and Montesquieu frequently articulated the evils of tyranny; Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Law* referenced tyranny twenty nine times.<sup>43</sup>

Understanding this, Bolívar continued to tailor his argument for the literate, largely Creole Congress by arguing that Spanish tyranny openly violated “the rights of men.”<sup>44</sup> The members of the Congress, disabled from civic engagement under Spanish rule, would have followed this argument easily. By claiming that the Spanish violated the rights of men, Bolívar justified complete independence and subsequent Creole civic engagement through an Enlightenment perspective which many Congressmen would have appreciated.

Bolívar also took care to dehumanize the Spanish. New Granada, “having miraculously escaped the clutches of those raging beasts,” needed to protect “their fellow compatriots, the

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<sup>41</sup> Arana, *Bolívar* 146.

<sup>42</sup> *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 17.

afflicted sons of Venezuela.”<sup>45</sup> Yet again, Bolívar made simple the decision before the Congress. Either they would aid Bolívar in his just fight to restore the rights of men and unshackle the Venezuelans, or they would ignore the cries of the oppressed and allow the bloodthirsty Spaniards to rule nearby. Reminding the New Granadans that they had only miraculously escaped the “raging beast” made inaction ethically inexcusable.

Bolívar then elected to continue his appeal to liberal Enlightenment thought while adding a religious dimension to his rhetoric:

Yes, the most illustrious martyrs in the cause of South American freedom have placed their confidence in the strong and liberal spirit of the people of New Granada. Caracas, the cradle of Colombian independence, surely deserves deliverance, like another Jerusalem, by new crusades of faithful republicans... [who] are imbued with a sublime inspiration to become the liberators of their captive brothers... [doing so] establishes therein the sacred laws of Justice and restores humanity to its natural rights.<sup>46</sup>

By likening revolution to the Crusades and Caracas to Jerusalem, Bolívar implied that even divine Providence favored intervention. Interestingly, framing Independence as a holy struggle against the evil Spaniards placed Bolívar in conversation with other revolutionary writers like Juan German Roscio, whose efforts to invert Spanish claim of religious righteousness (and alliance with the Church) were widely read by revolutionary Creoles.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, liberation entailed establishing the sacred laws of Justice *and* restoring humanity to its natural rights. Thus, not only did divine Providence favor independence, independence aligned itself with the protection of natural rights.

Finally, as he finished the address, Bolívar’s allusion to the liberation of “their captive brothers” affirmed his belief in Spanish enslavement and united the citizens of New Granada and Venezuela against their common enemy. Addressing an educated, largely Creole audience,

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<sup>45</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Gutierrez, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 515.

Bolívar selectively tailored his rhetorical devices to maximize their impact. In contrast to the *Cartagena Manifesto*, which reached every class within New Granada and thus featured every major rhetorical tool in his arsenal, Bolívar's address to the Congress of New Granada emphasized only Enlightenment rhetoric and Spain-as-mother metaphors that would have resonated most with the educated Creole congressional elite. Paired with the more famous *Cartagena Manifesto*, this address succeeded in its goal. Within weeks of his arrival in New Granada, Bolívar received command of a unit of troops and was well on his way to liberating Venezuela.

*Proclamation to the People of Venezuela*, June 15, 1813

Within weeks of appointment to command, Bolívar began his first successful campaign against the Spaniards, fittingly known as the Admirable Campaign.<sup>48</sup> As he retook Venezuela, Bolívar took the opportunity to share his revolutionary fervor with his fellow Venezuelans in the hope that they would see their homeland as a nation and work to expel the Spanish. His 1813 *Proclamation to the People of Venezuela* looked to accomplish just that. The Liberator began by reminding his audience that “our mission is designed only to break the chains of servitude which still shackle some of our towns, and not to impose laws or exercise acts of dominion.”<sup>49</sup> This distinction was important for two reasons. First, by claiming that he had no intention to have dominion, Bolívar made sure to respect powerful caudillo leaders whose support he needed.<sup>50</sup> Second, the claim also responded to Spanish attempts to incite race rebellion by claiming that the

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<sup>48</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolívar, A Life*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolívar, A Life*, 134.

revolutionary Creoles, not the Spanish, intended to oppress the largely non-Creole Venezuelan populace.<sup>51</sup>

More importantly, Bolívar's use of slavery rhetoric placed him in conversation with many popular and widely read authors. Most notably, Rousseau famously opened his Creole-favorite work the *Social Contract* with the assertion that "man is free but everywhere in chains" and devoted an entire section to the evils of slavery, which he defined as a tyrant "confining by force the liberty of an individual."<sup>52</sup> Others, including Montesquieu, also famously advocated against political slavery. The *Spirit of the Laws* mentions slavery thirty-nine times and claims that "in all despotic governments, the political slavery in some measure annihilates the civil liberty."<sup>53</sup> Bolívar, then, wielded slavery rhetoric to gain widespread support not only amongst Pardos and Blacks (who knew all too well of the evils of slavery), but also amongst literate Creoles, electing to contextualize and align his thoughts on slavery with widely read contemporary thinkers.

In continuing his calculated rhetorical campaign, Bolívar demonstrated his empathy by recalling how he had been "unable to observe with indifference the afflictions you were forced to experience by the barbarous Spaniards, who have ravished you, plundered you, and brought you death and destruction. They have violated the sacred rights of nations... and reduced the Republic of Venezuela to the most frightful destruction."<sup>54</sup> Employing the gendered rape metaphor signified a break from previous speeches, in which Bolívar casted Spain not as barbarous rapists, but as the mother of South America. This break was not without reason. 1813 Venezuela had fallen victim to numerous atrocities and massacres at the hands of the Spanish,

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Harvey, *Liberators: Latin America's Struggle for Independence*. The Overlook Press: New York, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (Dover: Dover Publications, 2003), 102.

<sup>53</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 239.

<sup>54</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 31.

including the deliberate generation of a “climate of terror” by Spanish troops after violating an armistice.<sup>55</sup> Thus, casting Spain as criminal rapists reminded war-torn Venezuelans of the most recent evils of the Spanish and solidified the need for strong, unilateral action to expel them.

As he closed his first proclamation to partially freed Venezuela, Bolívar connected Spanish cruelty with the need for Venezuelan action: “Justice therefore demands vengeance, and necessity compels us to exact it. Let the monsters who infest Colombian soil, who have drenched it in blood, be cast out forever.”<sup>56</sup> In a land where evidence of Spanish transgressions had been well documented, this rhetoric fell far short of hyperbole. Yet again, through dehumanizing the Spaniards, referring to natural rights, and employing heavy imagery, Bolívar crafted an effective argument for Venezuelan independence and nationhood. Ever the opportunist, Bolívar ended his strongest anti-Spanish manifesto by upping the stakes: instead of passively allowing monstrous bloodlust and rape, Bolívar declared an all-out war against the Spanish, promising to kill every Spaniard he encountered.<sup>57</sup>

*Addressed Delivered Before the Caracas Assembly, January 2, 1814*

Despite reconquering most of Venezuela in the Admirable Campaign, Bolívar and the revolutionaries still encountered strong royalist resistance and a populace hesitant to uniformly adopt revolutionary fervor. With that in mind, Bolívar convened a public assembly in front of the ancient church of San Francisco to solidify his authority and to promote further public support to expel royalist forces.<sup>58</sup> Given the setting and his Venezuelan audience, the Liberator needed to cast a wide rhetorical net; he addressed a multitude of classes and thus needed a multitude of

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<sup>55</sup> Harvey, *Liberators: Latin America's Struggle for Independence*, 109.

<sup>56</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 31.

<sup>58</sup> Arana, *Bolívar* 155.



rhetorical devices. Moreover, public opinion on independence and Venezuelan nationalism was far from settled at the time and Spanish resistance remained strong. Bolívar began with a reference to his first exile, noting that “hatred of tyranny banished me from Venezuela when I saw my country enchained for the second time; but love of liberty overcame every obstacle in the path which I took to redeem my country from the cruelties and tortures of the Spaniard.”<sup>59</sup>

Understanding that he addressed the entire Venezuelan population, Bolívar employed his entire rhetorical arsenal, referencing tyranny, implying slavery, and otherizing Spain.

Bolívar continued, referencing the failed first republic as an example the second republic ought to avoid: “you lost your honor in succumbing to the tyrant’s yoke. You were the victims of a cruel vengeance. The interests of the country were in the hands of bandits. Judge, therefore, whether your honor has been restored, whether your chains have been struck off.”<sup>60</sup> By claiming that a slave could retain honor only through striking off his chains, Bolívar not only aligned himself with slaves and distanced himself from the Spanish, but also implicitly criticized the institution of slavery and advocated rebellion. Given the efforts of the Spanish general José Tomás Boves to incite Pardo and Black racial violence against the largely Creole government, Bolívar’s reminder that he struck off chains would have countered Spanish claims that Creoles hoped to oppress colored Venezuelans.

Fittingly, he ended his argument for unity by recalling his first exile: “I sought the traitor who had caught you in his snare, only to leave you burdened with chains. Outraged, I resolved to die of misery and despair in the farthest corner of the globe rather than to be a witness to the excesses of despotism. I fled from tyranny, not to save my life, nor to bury it in obscurity, but to

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<sup>59</sup>Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, Volume 1, 59.

<sup>60</sup>Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, Volume 1, 59.

risk it in the battlefield in search of freedom and glory.”<sup>61</sup> After the speech, Governor Mendoza begged Bolívar to retain supreme power, which caused the crowd to cheer their support. Thus, Bolívar’s command of Enlightenment anti-tyranny rhetoric and allusions to slavery succeeded in solidifying support.<sup>62</sup>

Unfortunately, Bolívar’s rhetoric was not enough to prevent the Spanish insurgency from again expelling the Liberator and overthrowing the Second Republic in July 1814.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the 1814 proclamation reinforced Bolívar’s rhetorical campaign: when addressing the masses, he depended increasingly on slavery metaphors and otherizing Spain, as these devices were well received by every constituency he addressed.

*Manifiesto on the Execution of General Piar, October 17, 1817*

By 1817, the Liberator had not lived up to his name. His varied rhetorical arsenal gained him command in Cartagena and won him support as he initiated his Admirable Campaign, but it had not saved Venezuela from the counter insurgency. He had succeeded in expelling the Spanish from Venezuela once, but subsequently ceded control to the “monsters” immediately following his success. While in exile after the fall of the Second Republic, Bolívar wrote his famous *Jamaica Letter* (see Chapter 2) and recalculated his rhetorical campaign. The second liberation effort, Bolívar concluded in exile, must better appeal to the Pardo and Black majority whose violence played a critical role in the failure of the Admirable Campaign.

Despite the emphasis that the Second Campaign would place on gaining non-Creole support, Bolívar faced a serious threat to this goal when he court martialed general Manuel Piar in the summer of 1817. Piar, his only Pardo general, had attempted to incite racial anger and

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<sup>61</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 60.

<sup>62</sup> Arana, *Bolívar* 201.

<sup>63</sup> Bushnell, *Simon Bolívar*, xv.

resistance to Bolivarian leadership.<sup>64</sup> After a tribunal convicted Piar, Bolívar permitted Piar's execution, hoping to make an example of the insubordinate general.<sup>65</sup> Despite that, Bolívar understood Piar's popularity with his non-Creole soldiers and wisely elected to issue a manifesto to explain his reasoning and quell any potential revolt.<sup>66</sup> Given Spain's previous success of inciting racial violence and recruiting non-Creole support, Bolívar understood the importance of retaining the support of his audience:

Soldiers! You know this. Equality, liberty, and independence are our motto. Has not humankind regained its rights through our laws? Have our arms not destroyed the chains of slaves? Have not the odious differences between classes and colors been abolished forever? Has it not been ordered that the wealth of nations be fairly distributed among you?<sup>67</sup>

Bolívar reestablished himself as a Liberator, reminded his troops of the justification for fighting, and placed his goals in line with the goals of his soldiers when he placed equality and liberty on an equal scale as independence. More importantly, he claimed to have eliminated "odious" class and racial distinctions to which the majority of pro-Piar forces would have taken issue.

He was not finished there. Perhaps falling victim to political overstatement, Bolívar proclaimed himself a leader who hoped to fairly distribute the wealth of nations to all, regardless of race or previous economic status. Instead of losing authority and respect after the execution, Bolívar crafted a perfect manifesto to solidify authority and keep all his troops focused on the Spaniards, not insurrection. Ironically, Bolívar ended the supposedly egalitarian proclamation with a blatantly paternalistic reminder, that "I love you more than if I were your father or your son."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Arana, *Bolívar* 201.

<sup>65</sup> Waldo Frank, *Birth of a New World: Bolivar in Terms of His People*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1951) 151.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 90

<sup>68</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 90.

*Proclamation to the People of New Granada, August 22, 1818*

After successfully quelling any non-Creole backlash to General Piar's execution, Bolívar continued his war and rhetorical campaign. Sensing the opportunity to expand his audience, Simón Bolívar created a revolutionary newspaper known as the *Correo del Orinoco* in order to better publicize his message for independence in June 1818.<sup>69</sup> The *Correo* circulated throughout the country. Amongst the first proclamations printed in the *Correo* was his August *Proclamation to the People of New Granada*. "Granadans!" he began, "America's day has come. No human power can stay the course of Nature guided by the hand of Providence. Join your efforts to those of your brothers... to hurl the destroyers of New Granada into the seas. The sun will not have completed the course of its present round without beholding in all your territory the proud altars of liberty."<sup>70</sup> Yet again, Bolívar crafted a shared identity for the New Granadans and Venezuelans by referring to every reader as a "brother" and by urging his compatriots to fight in the name of Providence and expel the sub-human Spaniards. This technique, pairing more traditional rhetoric with appeals to South American solidarity, is emblematic of the Bolivarian letters in Chapter 2. Certainly, Bolívar's appeal here demonstrates another targeted campaign, this time to a clearly literate audience. As such, Bolívar's discussion of Providence, natural order, and "the proud altars of liberty" demonstrate his efforts to connect with the Creole, Enlightenment-educated readers of the *Correo*.

*Angostura Address, February 15, 1819*

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<sup>69</sup> Waldo Frank, *Birth of a New World*, 210.

<sup>70</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 154.

With the Spanish largely defeated in New Granada by 1819, Bolívar turned his sights towards Venezuela, where battle had resulted in a stalemate and significant royalist forces remained.<sup>71</sup> Just as Bolívar rallied New Granada behind him in the Cartagena Manifesto, Bolívar hoped to win the support of the second legislative Congress of Venezuela and New Granada and convince them to pass his constitutional provisions. Given that the congressmen hailed from twenty-six distinct cities and regions throughout Venezuela and New Granada, their endorsement could signify the transnational support the revolution required. Like his 1812 address to the New Granadan congress, the Angostura Address featured highly-specified rhetorical arguments. Bolívar spoke to a largely Creole constituency and altered his rhetoric to fit the occasion. The address, which employed an array of Bolivarian revolutionary rhetoric, succeeded in bringing to tears certain congressmen and rallying all present constituencies behind the need for further action against the Spanish.<sup>72</sup>

Bolívar began his case for continued action as he often did, by contrasting the virtuous Americans with the tyrannical Spaniards. Borrowing almost word for word a passage from the *Cartagena Manifesto*, Bolívar recalled that Spain had “deprived [America] of the pleasure of exercising active tyranny, since we were given no role in our domestic affairs and internal administration.”<sup>73</sup> That is to say, because Spain prevented South American civic participation, ruling Creole elites (such as the congressmen he addressed) had no opportunity to control domestic affairs. Given his audience’s interest in civic engagement and their previous disengagement under Bourbon rule, the delegates would have found this argument agreeable.

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<sup>71</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolívar, A Life* 117.

<sup>72</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolívar, A Life* 120.

<sup>73</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 174.

Bolívar continued, claiming that the American people were “enslaved by the triple yoke of ignorance, tyranny, and vice” and “never experienced knowledge, power, or virtue.”<sup>74</sup> Yet again Bolívar connected himself with popular Enlightenment radicals like Rousseau, Locke and Montesquieu through his language. Additionally, his decision to employ the slave metaphor was deliberate and calculated, despite the demographics of his audience. Here, Bolívar employed Rousseau’s notion of slavery, claiming slavery encompassed any instance in which a tyrant withheld knowledge, power, and virtue. Not only did the congressmen value this trio, they would have agreed with his claim that Spain had withheld all three. Thus, the most powerful Creoles in Venezuela were little more than slaves, since Spain had taken from them that which they valued most. Understanding his audience’s values, Bolívar took a metaphor typically intended for Pardos and slaves and repurposed it to deliver a humiliating truth to the most powerful men in Venezuela: if they did not act, Spain would continue to enslave them.

Moving forward, Bolívar continued to exploit the slave metaphor by expanding on the slave conditions suffered by all Venezuelans still under Spanish rule:

Their arms and legs numbed by chains, their sight dimmed in dark dungeons, and stricken by the plague of servility, will they ever be capable of marching with firm steps towards the august temple of Freedom? Can they approach near enough to admire its splendid beams of light and breathe its pure air without oppression?<sup>75</sup>

By referencing “the august temple of Freedom,” Bolívar again tailored his speech to his educated Creole audience. The contrast between the enchained Venezuelan brothers in dungeons with the glorious temple of Freedom made clear to all twenty-six delegates the need to endorse further

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<sup>74</sup>Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 176.

<sup>75</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 179.

action. Unsurprisingly, the speech evoked an emotional response by all and convinced the congressmen to rally behind the Liberators' message.<sup>76</sup>

As the address continued, Bolívar again employed symbolism in envisioning the newly freed Republic, "seated on the throne of liberty, grasping the scepter of justice, crowned by glory, and revealing to the old world the majesty of the modern world."<sup>77</sup> Just as he pandered to his soldiers in his *Manifiesto on the Execution of General Piar*, Bolívar adjusted his imagery in the *Angostura Address* to his affluent Creole audience. This claim, that the new world trumped the old world, was consistent with other revolutionary thinkers in North and South America alike, most notably famous poet Andrés Bello.<sup>78</sup> Thus, in arguing that independence would enable these Creoles to create a society that would trump the old world in majesty, Bolívar aligned his work with generations of continental American exceptionalism.

### *Conclusion: A Crucial Opportunity*

For Simón Bolívar and the revolutionary Creole elite, 1812-1819 saw incredible progress for their cause. While in 1812 only parts of New Granada retained independence, 1819 marked the establishment of the Angostura Congress, the passing of a constitution, and the complete expulsion of all Spaniards from New Granada. The Revolutionaries succeeded where they had twice failed in part because Bolívar understood the need for unity. For Bolívar, unity would follow from revolutionary rhetoric. The best way to convince his divided audiences of the common desire for independence was to rationalize independence in the ways that they appreciated. For illiterate non-Creoles, this entailed a heavy reliance on the slave metaphor and dehumanization of the Spanish. Bolívar's Creole counterparts, conversely, heard an argument

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<sup>76</sup> Lynch, *Bolívar, A life*, 168.

<sup>77</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 182.

<sup>78</sup> Gutierrez, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 542.

centered on Enlightenment-based understandings of liberty and tyranny. While revolutionaries fought the traditional battles, Bolívar bolstered the revolutionary front on the rhetorical front, ensuring sustained and widespread support for the cause.



### Chapter 3: Correspondence

While speeches and manifestos enabled Bolívar to reach a wide audience and employ a varied rhetorical arsenal, Bolívar also crafted rhetorical arguments for independence in individual letters written to important revolutionary figures. Through letter-writing, Bolívar successfully lobbied for support from a number of different constituencies and ensured that they remained in favor of independence. This chapter will examine twelve letters to two distinct audiences, South American patriots and interested British officials. Doing so will illustrate the extent to which Bolívar adopted a nuanced, multilayered approach and tailored his rhetoric to fit his audience and sustain crucial support bases. Organizing Bolívar's letter by recipient also demonstrates the extent to which Bolívar's depiction of independence and its benefits differed.

In contrast to his speeches, letters provided Bolívar a unique opportunity to target his rhetorical argument to a specific audience. While speeches such as the *Angostura Address* were printed and widely distributed, most letters were written for and read by only a single person.<sup>79</sup> As such, the Bolivarian letters exemplify the fluidity of Bolivarian rhetoric in independence. Whereas to the British, Bolívar could sell independence as a natural rights struggle against absolutist Spanish tyranny, letters to South American diplomats and generals were customized to appeal to popular notions of hemispheric fraternity and unity. Thus, while common Bolivarian rhetoric populated the Liberator's private letters, the letters form a remarkable example of the extent to which Bolívar manipulated his rhetoric to impact his audience.

Cultural norms of late colonial Spanish America encouraged letter writing between literate audiences. Through correspondence, Spanish Americans created networks of knowledge

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<sup>79</sup> Withers, Charles W. J. *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008),.

and engaged in discourse on current events and political philosophy.<sup>80</sup> Writing a detailed treatise and analysis of the justification for independence to interested British bystanders in Jamaica, thereby, not only provided an easy avenue to gain international support but also constituted a common contemporary cultural practice. By utilizing the cultural norm of letter-writing, Bolívar created direct and unimpeded access to individuals whose influence and power could potentially prove crucial to independence. This direct messaging not only prevented Spanish counter-arguments but also maximized the impact of pro-independence arguments by tailoring his rhetorical arsenal to the specific audience.

*To South American readers*

The majority of Bolivarian letters addressed South American leaders. Because Bolívar came from the literate revolutionary elite, he understood which rhetorical devices to employ for this demographic. These devices stressed sacrifice, unity, and brotherhood. Beginning in 1813 during his first Admirable Campaign into the Venezuelan interior, Bolívar thanked Manuel de Bernardo Álvarez, the President of Cudinamarca in New Granada and member of a prominent Colombian family, for his support of the Liberator's efforts:

The heroes of Venezuela, who have triumphed in hundreds of battles, always in behalf of freedom, have not crossed the wastelands, the *paramos*, and the mountain ranges only to impose chains on their compatriots, the sons of America. Our object is to unite all under one leadership, so that our resources may be directed toward the final end of restoring to the New World its rights of freedom and independence.<sup>81</sup>

This letter, written at the outset of the decades-long struggle for South American support against Spanish forces, served as a reminder as to why Álvarez had previously chosen to support the Liberator. Apparently, support of the troops signified support for a continent united “under one

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolivar, Volume 1*, 84.

leadership.”<sup>82</sup> Here, we see the earliest example of a common tactic of Bolivarian letters to South Americans: by assuming the unity and universality of the South American people, support for South American independence followed naturally.

Bolívar also drew upon his popular slave metaphor in crafting the argument. Wisely, he elected to utilize the slave metaphor only to necessitate the need for South American unity, a theme which became a key crux of the letter. To the Haitians, by contrast, Bolívar was unafraid to feature the slave metaphor:

I have proclaimed the emancipation of the slaves. The tyranny of the Spaniards has reduced them to such a state of stupidity and instilled in their souls such a great sense of terror that they have lost even the desire to be free!<sup>83</sup>

Written to Governor Jean Marion of Haiti, this letter focused exclusively on the slave metaphor. Because Haitian ex-slaves belonged to a separate cultural tradition, discussion of hemispheric unity was intentionally excluded despite Haiti’s geographic proximity. The differences between the two letters demonstrates the extent to which Bolívar not only understood his audience, but was willing to recast independence into a narrative that fit their interests. Unity wisely remained the focus of Bolívar’s letters to fellow South Americans, with whom he shared a cultural heritage under which they could unify. To French-speaking African Haitians, however, Bolívar shelved his appeal to South American unity in favor of a metaphor that would resonate with the recently liberated isle. Unity, then, only anchored Bolívar’s argument when corresponding with an individual with whom he shared a similar colonial heritage and culture.

The 1813 letter to the President of the New Granadan Congress provides an additional example of Bolívar’s emphasis on unity. Cognizant of the importance of New Granadan support in suppressing royalist General Boves’ counter-insurgency, Bolívar was careful to credit his

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 131.

success in Venezuela to his supporters: “Caracas looks at new Granada as its liberator. It sees its chains broken by the Granadan effort and see itself drawn from the grave and given life.”<sup>84</sup>

Again, the slave metaphor took a back seat to Bolívar’s likening Venezuelan independence to resurrection and to connecting Granadan effort to Venezuelan liberation. Of course, playing on religious tensions enabled Bolívar to invert Spanish self-depictions of religious righteousness and provided religious justification for continued fighting. Finally, Bolívar yet again capitalized on the opportunity to form a shared identity between Venezuela and New Granada through common hardship, connecting Granadan efforts to Venezuela’s fortuitous outcome.

Fittingly, sacrifice remained a common theme in Bolívar’s correspondence with South American leaders. Bolívar opened one 1814 letter to President Antonio Nariño of Cudinamarca strongly: “Desirous of distinguishing those soldiers that with their sacrifices and extraordinary strengths contributed to the happy success of the campaign that liberated Venezuela.”<sup>85</sup> While the Admirable Campaign had temporarily succeeded in ending Spanish rule, maintaining popular support remained a top priority in May of 1814. Insurgent forces, led by General Boves, threatened to erase the “happy success of the campaign” by recruiting South Americans.<sup>86</sup> Understanding this, Bolívar returned to his favorite letter-writing devices. He underscored the collective sacrifices of Nariño’s Cudinamarcan soldiers and claimed they were causal to the securing of Venezuelan freedom. Doing so, Bolívar hoped, would extend New Granadan support and help him permanently expel royalist forces. Unfortunately, these initial efforts to unify were in vain. Boves’ counter-rhetorical campaign proved more successful. Eventually, pro-Royalist South American support grew so large that it caused the collapse of the Second Republic and forced Bolívar into exile a second time.

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<sup>84</sup>Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolivar, Volume 1*, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Simon Bolivar and Vicente Lecuna, *Cartas del Libertador*, (Caracas: Banco de Venezuela) 24.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

The second exile, however, only solidified Bolívar's preference for rhetoric in his letters. Upon his return, Bolívar wrote to General Marino in February 1817 to coordinate battle plans: "Beloved companion," Bolívar began, "I am overjoyed; more from the arrival of the Spanish troops than yours. Providence urges these men to sacrifice on the altar of the Patria."<sup>87</sup> Three years since the initial success of the Admirable Campaign and his first reference to sacrifice in a letter, Bolívar again employed sacrifice to benefit his cause.

Much like the Admirable Campaign, Bolívar's second invasion in 1817 involved a fierce propaganda campaign between the Spanish and the Americans. Public opinion was far from fixed, and Bolívar constantly needed to reaffirm the support of his generals and troops. With this in mind, Bolívar returned to his favorite theme: sacrifice. Fittingly, it was not Bolívar, but Providence that urged military sacrifice for the sake of the Patria. That the sacrifice would occur at the urging of Providence and "at the altar of the Patria" added a religious dimension to the violent revolution. It also created a collective identity for the Patria, whose needs trumped that of the individual. Thus, even in his letters, Bolívar was cognizant to provide meaning and depth to the cause of revolution.

Of course, Bolívar's religious commentary on Providence took back seat to his emphasis on unity, sacrifice, and Patria. After all, he was writing a justification for independence, not a theological treatise. This was not the case in all Bolivarian letters, however. The religious element varied according to the audience to whom he addressed. Bolívar's letter to the Archbishop of Venezuela, for example, reveals the extent to which he was willing to shift focus to religion when helpful. Spain, Bolívar wrote, "has reduced a flourishing country (which the Supreme Being has not condemned to an eternal dependency on Spain) to a state of lamentable

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<sup>87</sup>Bolívar, *Cartas del Libertador*, 88.

and unprecedented desolation.”<sup>88</sup> Yet again, Bolívar understood that different rhetorical strategies would move different colonial actors. While Church audiences required divine justification, typical South Americans could be convinced by religious arguments but overwhelmingly favored appeals to unity and sacrifice.

Despite his exaltation of sacrifice, public perception continually threatened to derail Bolívar’s rhetorical campaign. Public perception posed a particular threat in 1819, after Bolívar elected to execute popular Pardo general Piar. As previously discussed, executing Piar risked the alienation of Bolívar’s Pardo and non-Creole soldiers, who constituted a majority of the revolutionary army. Interestingly, Bolívar’s private correspondence with diplomat Luis López Méndez contained markedly different rhetoric and reasoning than his aforementioned manifesto (Chapter 1) to his soldiers. “At this moment General Piar began to provoke a race war. It did not matter who conceived other projects no less disastrous and the republic was threatened by all the horrors of anarchy and Civil War. The common danger unites the spirits, the cost and necessity of a united political front became evident.”<sup>89</sup> Notably absent from the correspondence was the manifesto’s exaltation of brotherhood, liberty, equality, and abolition, all rhetorical arguments favored by non-Creole masses and heavily featured in his original manifesto. Instead, a practical cost-benefit analysis served to remind his Creole reader that unity ought to triumph over anarchy. Understanding that he spoke to a fellow Creole elite, Bolívar edited out the rhetoric that would have resonated with slaves and Creoles and instead included the basic call to unity that characterized his correspondence with South American Creoles.

Bolívar wrote to revolutionary leaders throughout the continent, not just those in Northern South American. His letter to newly-crowned dictator Juan Martín Pueyrredón of Rio

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<sup>88</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1*, 36.

<sup>89</sup> Bolívar, *Cartas del Libertador*, 165.

Plata proves that his conversation of unity and sacrifice did not end in northern South America, but extended to the tips of the continent. While Pueyreddon had temporarily subdued Spanish forces in the river plate, his hold over the region was as fragile as Bolívar's. Thus, with hopes of urging Pueyreddon to "cooperate actively" in aiding "our struggle for freedom," Bolívar began by lauding Venezuela for "devoting everything to the sacred cause of freedom" and "regard[ing] her sacrifices as triumph."<sup>90</sup> In contrast to his 1813 letter to the New Granadan Congress, Bolívar credited Venezuelan liberation to Venezuelan sacrifice, not New Granadan efforts. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of freedom and sacrifice would not limit itself to a Northern South American audience. If both leaders were to find success in their struggles, Bolívar argued, they would need to understand their efforts as part of a united continental effort to expel tyranny.

Again borrowing from previous letters, Bolívar continued by commenting that "upon the altars of patriotism, she has offered her blood in torrents, her towns in flames."<sup>91</sup> This effusive praise for Venezuela's efforts, paired with extensive use of fraternal rhetoric, delivered a clear message to Pueyreddon: revolution necessitated continental action. By choosing sacrifice, collectivism, and the altar of the Patria as his rhetorical devices, Bolívar included Pueyreddon in his decade long correspondence with leading South Americans about the importance of independence. Ignoring geographical and ethnic differences (Pueyreddon was half French and ruled thousands of miles to the south), Bolívar instead cultivated transcontinental unity using the same techniques that had been effective on his northern countrymen.

Collectively, Bolívar's correspondence with South American leaders reveals a clear rhetorical campaign targeted at a specific group. While he occasionally employed religious arguments, appeals to slavery, or other rhetorical devices, Bolívar understood how best to

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<sup>90</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolivar, Volume 1*, 159.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

connect with the Creole South American class: by emphasizing sacrifice and unity. In so doing, Bolívar urged his fellow Creole elite to embrace their shared identity and continue to their commitment to revolution.

### *To British Readers*

In contrast to his South American readers, Bolívar dealt with an entirely distinct demographic with the British. Fortunately, Bolívar understood the benefit of winning additional support from the British. Unfortunately, Britain's struggles against the Napoleonic armies prevented wide-scale British military involvement.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, Bolívar sought British support by framing independence as creating open markets in which British merchants could operate. Even though widespread British military involvement was never possible, Bolívar hoped his British letters would recruit individual British investment in men, ships, or arms.<sup>93</sup>

Given the different audience, Bolívar adopted a different approach. Instead of unity, Bolívar connected the independence struggle in a way the British would appreciate. Specifically, he not only underscored popular Enlightenment ideals like liberty and natural rights, he connected independence with contemporary British anti-Spanish propaganda. Writing not only to regional British authorities in the Caribbean but also nobility in England, Bolívar hoped that British support for American independence would tip the balance against the Spaniards.

Fortunately, convincing the British of the Spanish evil would not be difficult. Centuries of British anti-Spanish propaganda (what scholars now term "The Black Legend") had underscored Spanish racial inferiority and colonial cruelty. Of course, this one-sided critique ignored British colonial exploits, but perhaps that was the point. Focusing on Spanish evil and

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<sup>92</sup> W.H. Koebel, *British Exploits in South America; A History of British Activities in Latin America*, (New York: The Century Co, 1917).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*



dehumanizing the Spanish enabled the British to portray themselves as comparably justified and civilized in their colonial exploits. Thus, Bolívar's anti-Spanish treatises ironically confirmed racist British attitudes towards individuals of Spanish descent. Despite that, Bolívar understood that doing so increased the likelihood of receiving essential British aid and elected to exploit the Black Legend for his own gain.

A February 1814 release entitled "On the Policy of England" in the *Gaceta de Caracas* enabled Bolívar to explain his rationale for seeking British support. While Spain more closely resembled "a dying old man" after expelling the French, British interests supported free trade with South America.<sup>94</sup> "The policies and the mercantile interests of England and Spain are diametrically opposed with respect to America. Spain, unable to keep us tranquilly enslaved, is now bent upon our destruction; England, favoring our independence, is interested in our prosperity."<sup>95</sup> Wielding a valid economic argument, Bolívar demonstrated how mercantile Britain benefitted from free trade with a sovereign South America. With his justification for recruiting British support aptly articulated, Bolívar continued to write to regional British authorities.

Fortunately, Bolívar had extensive experience with British audiences by 1813. Prior to attaining military command, he accompanied Francisco de Miranda on a diplomatic mission to London.<sup>96</sup> While they failed to come to an agreement with the British and no support or formal recognition of sovereignty was recognized, this experience prepared Bolívar for his extensive writings to British authorities in the early years of the Revolution. Thus, Bolívar had ample practice relating American independence as in line with British interests.

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<sup>94</sup> *Bolívar*, Selected Writings of Bolívar, Volume 1, 69.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Arana, *Bolívar*, 48.

Consider his October 1813 letter to Governor James Cockburn of Curacao, a British colony in the Caribbean. Written in the months following the Admirable Campaign, Bolívar urged Governor Cockburn to “tell me what path of salvation remains for us to follow in dealing with these monsters, for whom no rights of man exists, no virtue, no honor, no inner prompting to halt their wickedness.”<sup>97</sup> Obviously, Bolívar did not write the letter with the sole purpose of seeking advice. Given the stark contrast with which he depicted Spanish and American forces and his dehumanization of the Spanish, Bolívar intended to gain a crucial hemispheric ally. He did so by depicting the Spaniards exactly how the British reader would want and expect them to be depicted: as subhuman beasts. Absent were calls for continental solidarity and brotherhood. Lacking were considerations of slavery, since British Caribbean holdings had historically relied heavily on slave labor. Instead, Bolívar began with a blatant hypothetical: “consider a continent, separated from Spain by immense seas, and more populous and rich than she, subjugated for three centuries to a degrading and tyrannical dependency.”<sup>98</sup>

Given the extensive dehumanization in the Cockburn letter, Bolívar both knew and exploited this European rivalry. His dehumanization of the Spaniards continued: “these villains have already raised pitiful monuments to their mad cruelty. Defenseless women, little children, and tremulous old folk have been found beaten, their eyes torn out, disemboweled, to such an extent that we are led to believe that the tyrants of America are not of the human species.”<sup>99</sup> Bolívar’s graphic commentary on Spanish atrocities enabled him to determine that the Spanish were not only tyrannical, but sub-human. Thus, the Bolívar applied the Black Legend to fit with his interest, independence.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 39.

Bolívar also took care to place his dehumanization of the Spaniards in conversation with contemporary Enlightenment ideals of civil liberty and social contract based governance that British readers favored. To the observer that would have pointed to the revised 1810 Cadiz constitution as evidence for Spanish humanity and righteousness, Bolívar pointed out that “even as the Spanish Constitution was being published as the bulwark of civil liberty, hundreds of victims, bearing shackles and irons were being dragged into filthy, legal underground vaults.”<sup>100</sup> This served to dismiss any depictions of the Spanish as the embodiment of rights based governance and liberty. Instead, even when they championed civil liberty, they only did so as a calculated political move. In reality, the Spanish represented the antagonist to civil liberty.

The case for ending three centuries of degrading tyrannical rule continued. Bolívar lamented that “for three centuries, America groaned beneath this tyranny, the most grueling to afflict the human race. For three centuries, America bemoaned the tragic riches that held such great attraction for her oppressors.”<sup>101</sup> While the Spanish “beasts” were clearly subhuman, Bolívar personified the American continent, stating that the continent “groaned” and “bemoaned” beneath Spanish tyranny.<sup>102</sup> In determining which side Cockburn ought to support, the personification and dehumanization polarized the two forces. Either Cockburn could side with tyrannical beasts that had systematically degraded an entire continent, or he could defend liberty and natural rights by supporting virtuous revolutionaries that espoused Enlightenment ideals.

In true rhetorical form, Bolívar saved his strongest rhetorical appeal for last. He closed the letter by asking “What is your Excellency's opinion?”<sup>103</sup> If the letter had not gone far enough

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 43.

in convincing Cockburn of American righteousness, Bolívar reframed the question so as to ensure he received the correct answer: “Should the Americans patiently await their own exterminations, or should they destroy that iniquitous race of men, which, while it breathes, works unceasingly for our annihilations?”<sup>104</sup> Given the adjusted question, Bolívar ensured that Cockburn would respond favorably.

The Cockburn letter exemplifies targeted Bolivarian rhetoric. Understanding the British Enlightenment and imperial perspective, Bolívar excluded certain rhetorical arguments like slavery and brotherhood in favor of more impactful dehumanization of Spaniards and espousing of Enlightenment principles. In so doing, he rationalized independence as justifiable for altogether distinct reasons, creating a multilayered independence narrative.

Only three months later, Bolívar again crafted a similar argument to Sir Richard Wellesley of London. Sir Wellesley, whom Bolívar had met on his diplomatic mission to London, was a powerful London politician and former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Wellesley had previously expressed to Bolívar an interest to learn more about the South American revolution. Cognizant of the opportunity provided to him in addressing such an influential lord, Bolívar utilized his British-specific rhetorical arsenal. Unfortunately, Wellesley’s interest occurred at a low point in the movement: the Spanish had reconquered Venezuela and expelled the Liberator. Initially, “shame had prohibited me from writing you about it, and you, with your love for our independence, could only have learned of it with regret.”<sup>105</sup>

Nonetheless, Bolívar continued with his admittedly biased commentary on recent events. Of course, he personalized Spanish evil for Wellesley. “Picture to yourself the tyrannical system

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 64.

of the Spanish government, the cruelty of the individual Spaniard, and the general thirst for vengeance and the private resentments of individuals, and you can then imagine the sorry plight of my unhappy country in those distressing days. Truly, she was suffering mortal agony."<sup>106</sup> This cruelty had created dungeons that "swallowed entire towns. In them, heaped one upon the other, lay Venezuelans weighted with chains, existing on vile and miserable rations. And left to die in tombs."<sup>107</sup> Hopefully, Sir Wellesley, who had previously expressed his preference for American sovereignty, would not view these atrocities with indifference. Bolívar highlighted the barbarous actions of the bloodthirsty Black Legend Spaniards in order to force British support.

After providing an update on the struggle, Bolívar provided commentary on how this fate could have been avoided. Unsurprisingly, Bolívar pointed to the lack of definite British support as causal to the eventual collapse of the republic. "What happened in Venezuela was what I had always predicted, namely, that if England did not support our cause a civil war would break out among us, which only a public declaration by Great Britain could stop."<sup>108</sup> This civil war caused the collapse of the republic and the lamentable state of affairs that afflicted Venezuela.

Contextualized with his previous depiction of Spanish atrocities, Bolívar's message is clear: only British support can prevent the destruction of an entire continent. Given Wellesley's importance in the formation of British foreign policy, stating that all the aforementioned Spanish evil could have been avoided with a little British help exemplifies a blatantly comical appeal for British aid.

Bolívar ended the letter with a fitting prediction: the British will help liberate the Americans. "The government of St. James, bent as always upon the liberation of America, will accord her its protection; and the Lord Marquess of Wellesley, a great power in the government

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 67.

of your nation, will be inclined to favor a cause as just as ours.”<sup>109</sup> Combining flattery with his traditional Spanish dehumanization, Bolívar wisely followed his shaming of previous British non-involvement with a flattering prediction that the British government would pursue justice.

### *The Jamaica Letter*

Of course, the most famous of Bolívar’s correspondence to the British world occurred in September 1815, while staying in exile in Jamaica. Bolívar arrived in Jamaica defeated and broke. He was forced to borrow from wealthy British merchants just to pay rent while on the island. Still hunted by the Spanish, he survived an assassination attempt as well.<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, Bolívar released his 6,000 word treatise to Henry Cullen, “a gentleman of this island” and the greater British reading public.<sup>111</sup> Through the letter, Bolívar hoped to articulate to the English-speaking world the justification behind South American independence. Thus, the letter in some ways resembled his public speeches in that, while it was addressed to Henry Cullen, Bolívar had a larger (although homogenous) audience captivated at the time of writing.

Bolívar began the letter in familiar fashion, by marking the difference between evil Spain and its subject, America: “there is nothing we have not suffered at the hands of that unnatural stepmother- Spain. The veil has been torn asunder. We have already seen the light, and it is not our desire to be thrust back into darkness. The chains have been broken; we have been freed, and now our enemies seek to enslave us anew.”<sup>112</sup> Bolívar combined the slave metaphor with his typical depiction of Spanish evil, understanding that former owners in Jamaica would understand the desire to be free and at the same time dislike the “unnatural stepmother” for depriving her

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<sup>109</sup> Lynch, *Simon Bolivar, A Life*, 124.

<sup>110</sup> Although his invited guest, Felix Amestoy, did not fare so well. The servant the Spanish had hired mistakenly stabbed and killed Amestoy, who had been sleeping in Bolívar’s bed. From Lynch, *Simon Bolivar, A Life*, 124.

<sup>111</sup> Bolivar, *Selected Writings of Bolivar*, 103.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 103-104.

child of freedom. Additionally, by casting Spain as the stepmother (and not the mother), Bolívar enabled himself to draw on a child metaphor while at the same time questioning the validity of Spain's relationship with its colonies. Contemporary writing in early nineteenth-century Great Britain featured similar sensibility abolitionist rhetoric.<sup>113</sup> Thus, Bolívar connected with contemporary British literary norms with his analogy.

Bolívar continued to connect his rhetoric with popular British abolitionist writing in stating that, despite their dire circumstances, "Most of the men have perished rather than be slaves; those who survive continue to fight furiously... until they expire of hurl into the sea those who, insatiable in their thirst for blood and crimes, rival those first monsters who wiped out America's primitive race."<sup>114</sup> Clearly, the Black Legend played an integral part in Bolívar's Jamaica Letter. Additionally, Given Jamaica's history as a slave colony, this depiction of white Creoles falling into slavery would have played on British racialized fears. Of course, Bolívar's comparison of contemporary Spanish bloodlust with prior Spanish "monsters" again depicted the Spanish as subhuman.

Exploiting the slave metaphor enabled Bolívar to contribute his own political theory, as well. In articulating South America's regrettable lack of civic virtue, Bolívar credited Spanish enslavement, arguing:

We are still in a position lower than slavery, and therefore it is more difficult for us to rise to the enjoyment of freedom... States are slaves because of either the nature or the misuse of their constitutions; a people is therefore enslaved when the government, by its nature or its vices, infringes on and usurps the rights of the citizen or subject. Applying these principles, we find that America was denied not only its freedom but even an active and effective tyranny. Let me explain. Under absolutism there are no recognized limits to the exercise of governmental powers.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Carey, Brycchan. *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

<sup>114</sup> Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, 107.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

Connecting with European Enlightenment thinker's criticism of absolutism, Bolívar argued that Spanish colonization created even worse realities than monarchical absolutism. Colonization entailed absolutism to a foreign ruler, subjecting the South Americans to the absolutist rule of an entirely different people. The British, with their historical philosophical aversion of absolutism, would have found this point incredibly powerful.

Moreover, South American lack of civic virtue could be attributed to their exclusion in the political process. Apparently, Spain "has kept us in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs. If we could at least have managed our domestic affairs and our internal administration, we could have acquainted ourselves with the processes and mechanics of public affairs. That is why I say we have even been deprived of an active tyranny, since we have not been permitted to exercise its functions."<sup>116</sup> Referring to South American political noninvolvement as a "permanent infancy," Bolívar combined the stepmother metaphor with his argument against absolutism. The natural solution to South America's permanent infancy, of course, would be to end Spanish rule. Thus, Bolívar's discussion of absolutism in the Jamaica letter provided a political justification for independence.

In addition to expanding on British hatred for absolutism, Bolívar also utilized rhetorical questions three times in the letter: "And shall Europe, the civilized, the merchant, the lover of liberty, allow an aged serpent, bent only on satisfying its venomous rage, devour the fairest part of our globe?"<sup>117</sup> Ignoring the fact that the "serpent" Spain was in civilized Europe, Bolívar played on British racial stereotypes with this question. He also connected the Spanish with the Christian creation legend by comparing them to a serpent. Of course, no country as liberal and

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 108.



civilized as Britain (which had abolished the slave trade in 1807) could allow an evil serpent to destroy liberty.

Later, Bolívar employed another rhetorical question to make a similar point “Is it not an outrage and a violation of human rights to expect a land so splendidly endowed, so vast, rich, and populous, to remain merely passive?”<sup>118</sup> Yet again, Bolívar framed the question in such a way so as to ensure the answer favored his cause. He played on British love for natural rights and Enlightenment ideology to argue for involvement in the South American independence struggle. Bolívar began his final rhetorical question with an explicit reference to Montesquieu, the popular Enlightenment political philosopher.

It is harder, Montesquieu has written, to release a nation from servitude than to enslave a free nation... South Americans have made efforts to obtain liberal, even perfect, institutions, doubtless out of that instinct to aspire to the greatest possible happiness... But are we capable of maintaining in proper balance the difficult charge of a republic? Is it conceivable that a newly emancipated people can soar to the heights of liberty, and, unlike Icarus, neither have its wings melt nor fall into an abyss?<sup>119</sup>

By referencing not only Montesquieu but also classical Greek mythology, Bolívar employed two references that would not have been lost on his British audiences. Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, which articulated the need for political liberty, was widely read in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Interestingly, Bolívar likened South American political ambitions to Icarus, warning that over-ambition could lead to disastrous consequences. Bolívar’s British readers would have understood the implicit criticism of Spain and of enslaving South America inherent to the Icarus comparison. While Bolívar feared that a free South America would fly too close to the sun, the Icarus metaphor illustrated that South America was just in its quest for freedom.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 112.

*Conclusion: A Multilayered Approach*

Whether he addressed classically educated British merchants or high ranking Venezuelan officials, Bolívar capitalized on the privacy afforded him in his letters. Independence meant distinct realities to each group of people, a truth that the Liberator was clearly conscious of when writing each letter. Independence, then, need not remain a static reality creating precisely the same benefits to revolutionary South Americans as it did to international onlookers, or Catholic superiors. Instead, Bolívar manipulated the meaning of Independence so as to create a cause which gave benefits to a multitude of interests and which many distinct groups could support. In so doing, the letters contributed to the larger conversation Bolívar facilitated on the abuses of the Spaniards and the righteousness of independence.

## Conclusion: Rhetoric as Remarkable

Northern South America failed twice to break away from Spain before finally achieving independence with the Third Republic. In all, the South American wars for independence spanned seventeen years, beginning with the 1812 establishment of the First Republic of Venezuela and ending with King Ferdinand VII's final attempt to retake the colonies in 1829. The effort was at times hopeless, and the battles were always bloody. Independence was not an overnight effort. Nor was it a fleeting moment. It was a decades' long conflict that consumed a continent, killed thousands, and required extensive sacrifice by every party involved.

The revolution, then, could not have been sustained without a spirit, without a purpose. Simón Bolívar, ever the opportunist, understood this and chose his words accordingly. Understanding that independence necessarily had to signify distinct advantages to South American's multiple, competing groups, Bolívar created a meaning for independence that was at the same time multilayered and consistent. He faced an incredible challenge; victory necessitated convincing both slaveholder and slave, Creole and Pardo, priest and foreigner that independence, not colonial reliance, was in their interests.

For Bolívar, then, independence necessitated victory on two distinct but related fronts. When he was not coordinating battle plans or climbing mountain peaks, he was writing letters to influential individuals or addressing the masses to sustain the movement. To the Pardos and Creoles he dreamed of a racially-just world in which liberty and equality struck off chains and ended odious class differences. Wealthy, educated Creoles were reminded of their political disenfranchisement, economic oppression, and the enlightenment principles that illuminated these injustices. British onlookers received a similar Enlightenment-based approach, although a

significant effort was made to connect to the Black Legend. Church officials, Haitian ministers, Rio Platan dictators- each received a carefully considered and carefully executed explanation.

Doing so, Bolívar understood, provided the independence movement with the spirit it needed. It framed the revolution as pure and ethical and the counter-revolution as corrupt and evil. As such, Bolivarian rhetoric ensured the sustainability of the revolution; constant reminders of *why* revolution was just fueled the movement and propelled its actors towards victory.

Nonetheless, it is equally true that, despite these completely unique depictions, Bolívar's vision for independence was consistent and valid. Revolution tore down the old Spanish society and created endless opportunity to begin anew. Bolívar's idealism and leadership made a new society imaginable. Slaves and Pardos could reasonably hope to improve their societal position, if independence found success. Wealthy Creoles could, at the same time, fight for independence understanding that a new society would enable them greater political and economic power. South American independence became a collective movement, defined by multiple distinct yet non-mutually exclusive shared visions.

Of course, post-independence implementation of the quasi-utopic society about which Bolívar dreamed proved incredibly problematic. The reality of post-independence provided multiple gigantic obstacles that Bolívar simply did not have the ability to address during the struggle. Societal disunion and factionalism thwarted Bolívar in his governance efforts. He was even the subject of multiple assassination attempts. Ever the dreamer and general but not the dictator, a dejected Bolívar surrendered himself to a self-imposed exile in 1830 and dejectedly lamented that "all who have served the Revolution have ploughed the sea."<sup>120</sup>

It is with this statement, approaching midnight on a Friday night and in the final page of my senior thesis, and after over a year of Bolívar study, that I feel compelled to articulate my

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<sup>120</sup> *Selected Writings of Bolivar, Volume 2*, and (Caracas: Banco de Venezuela, 1951) 765.

disagreement with the Liberator. To serve Revolution is not to plough the sea, and the efforts of Bolívar and his men were not in vain. Obvious geopolitical implications aside, there is much to be gained and to be learned from the South American patriots who toiled, fought, and sacrificed for *patria* and revolution. The extent to which Bolívar's rhetoric unified South America's many distinct and competing classes and interests under the single banner of independence demonstrates the importance of rhetoric in social movements. The Liberator depended on his rhetoric to convince multiple distinct ethnic groups of the need to rebel. He continued to underscore this need throughout the movement, thereby providing the revolution with a rhetorical and ethical backbone that would justify years of violence. Aided, of course, by the galvanizing presence of the Spaniards, Bolivar successfully articulated common cause for all to undertake enormous collective and individual sacrifices. He ignored that which divided them in favor of a common narrative that united them. Doing so may not have produced a clean system of governance post-independence, but it did accomplish the extraordinary.

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