

# Simón Bolívar

(1783-1830)

Venezuelan Liberator of Northern South America



## FIRST PHASE OF BOLÍVAR'S LIFE

- 1783 Simón Bolívar was born in Caracas, [Venezuela](#), as a Spanish citizen in the Captaincy General, which was part of the Viceroyalty of the Nueva Granada.  
He came from a rich and influential family of *criollos* whose first members arrived in Venezuela in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.  
His teachers (tutors) were Andrés Bello, the most prominent humanist and grammarian of Bolívar's lifetime, and Simón Rodríguez, who was an outspoken iconoclast and rationalist.  
Due to their French-influenced teaching, Bolívar can be considered a disciple of the social and political doctrines of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.  
His parents died when he was very young, and he was raised by an uncle who paid little attention to him.
- 1799 He went to Spain to finish his education.
- 1802 Bolívar married María Teresa Rodríguez del Toro y Alaysa, the niece of the Marqués de Toro (a prominent city in Castile) while living in Spain. She died from yellow fever less than a year later during a trip they took to Venezuela. (Simón Bolívar never married again.)
- 1804 He traveled to Paris, France. He was fluent in French. He joined the group surrounding Napoleon Bonaparte briefly.  
Bolívar met Alexander von Humboldt and was so impressed and motivated by that he used the German explorer-scientists experience and vast writings about the Americas that he grounded much of his vision for the fight for South American independence on Humboldt. Andrea Wulf (2016) says this about their relationship: "Humboldt had presented the natural world as a reflection of South American identity—a portrait of a continent that was strong, vigorous and beautiful. And that was exactly what Bolívar was doing when he used nature to galvanize his compatriots or to explain his political views" (p. 161).
- 1806 He traveled to the U.S.A., visiting Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Charleston, South Carolina. While in the US

he tried to get American help for his plans to liberate South American from Spanish control. In general, he held contradictory ideas about the United States, but he did say that the USA was "the great adventure of mankind." He thought that South America should have a government that was a fusion of the governments of both England (monarchy) and the USA (federal republic). He feared American democracy because he felt that Latin America's people were not sufficiently educated or ready for democracy. In this regard, he said:

"It is amazing that this model in North America should subsist so prosperously and should not become entangled at the appearance of the first obstacle or danger—although that nation is a rare model in political virtues and in moral examples—and granting the fact that liberty was its cradle, and that it was reared and nourished on freedom—I will say it all, although this nation is unique in the history of mankind, it is prodigious, I repeat, that a system so weak and complicated could have governed it through circumstances so difficult and delicate as the past one."

- 1810 Bolívar was, generally speaking, a utopian who hoped to create one American nation, but he realized that his was not possible. He traveled to London, where he attempted again to obtain English aid for his liberation plans. In this city he got Francisco de Miranda to join his cause to help the South American revolutionaries.

## SECOND PHASE OF BOLÍVAR'S LIFE

- 1811 The *criollos* in Caracas declared independence from Spain  
Bolívar and Miranda then returned to Caracas, Venezuela.  
Miranda is named commander of the rebel army.
- 1812 (July 12) Bolívar wrote to Miranda promising to give his commander an account of Bolívar's defeat at Puerto Cabello (for this letter, see: => [Bolívar Document #1](#))  
Miranda surrenders to the Spanish colonial army when Bolívar handed him over to the Spanish. Bolívar thought Miranda was a traitor, but Bolívar never justified his action.  
Bolívar flees to Cartagena de Indias where he joins the rebels in [Colombia](#).  
He wrote his Manifiesto de Cartagena, in which he analyzes the political, social, and economic causes—including an earthquake in Caracas—for the fall of Venezuela's first republic.
- 1813 Bolívar named commander of an army in Colombia, and then he invades Venezuela. He killed all his Spanish prisoners, and he also gets new recruits for the rebel cause. As a result of victories in Venezuela, he was proclaimed *El Libertador* (the Liberator). He then proclaimed the Second Venezuelan Republic, but this free republic fell apart within a

year. (For Bolívar's address accepting such honors, see: => **Bolívar Document #2**)

- 1814 Bolívar wrote a poem on June 10, 2013, in the form of an ode, in which he celebrated his joy upon seeing and climbing Mount Chimborazo, near Quito, Ecuador. At that time, this mountain was thought to be the tallest mountain peak in the world. (For his poem, "Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo" [My Chimborazo Delirium], see: => Bolívar's poem.)
- While the rebellion is going on in South America, king Fernando VII returns to the throne of Spain, where he becomes one of the worst despots in history. Fernando VII then sends large Spanish armies to South America to fight the rebels.
- As a result of Fernando VII's actions, the prosperous criollos in Nueva Granada (Gran Colombia) no longer wanted to support Spain; so they join the rebellion.
- Bolívar led an army into Bogotá, Colombia, but all sorts of internal disputes erupted within the rebel forces.
- 1815-1816 Bolívar then fled to first to Curaçao, then to Colombia, then to Jamaica, where he sought English aid.
- Then he went to Haiti, where he asked the free Haitian leader, Alexandre Pétion, for support.
- During this time, he wrote a diary about South America and its problems. In it he makes the following points:
- Latin America lacks a "political attitude";
  - Latin America has a heritage of neglect and ill treatment from Spain;
  - Latin Americans are "passive";
  - Latin America has been governed by incompetent subordinates;
  - Democracy and republics are not appropriate for Latin America;
  - Latin America does not need a monarchy, but it does need paternalistic governments;
  - Many small republics would suit Latin America better than the idea of manifest destiny, which was guiding the United States;
  - Mexico should lead all of Latin America, and should model an ideal for all of Latin America; but this result would not be possible throughout Latin America due to the obstacles of geography and climate differences.
- 1816 With the help of Haitian soldiers and money, which he got from Pétion in exchange for freeing the black slaves in Venezuela, Bolívar successfully landed in Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela.
- Bolívar then returns to Haiti.
- 1817 The llaneros (men from the plains of central and south Venezuela) join the rebellion and become the first major fighters to join Bolívar against the Spanish armies.
- 1819 Volunteers arrive from England to help Bolívar.

- Bolívar's battered army marches to Colombia, where it wins a major victory and thereby adds New Granada to territories free from Spanish control,
- Bolívar goes to Venezuela, where he creates the idea for Gran Colombia (Venezuela, Colombia—which included Panamá—and Ecuador).
- (May) He leads his army (Páez's horesmen, free slaves, women and their children, mestizos, creoles, Indians, and the "British Legions" with 5,000 English and Irish soldiers and 50,000 arms) from Angostura across the Andes.
- 1820-1823      Meanwhile, in Spain, Spanish liberals revolt against king Fernando VII; this revolt in the fading "mother country" helps the rebels in South America.
- 1821              Gran Colombia is declared a reality with Bolívar as president and Francisco de Paula Santander as vice president.
- Bolívar marches to Ecuador and liberates it from Spain.
- Bolívar sent a letter to Alexander von Humboldt in which he told the German scientist-explorer that the latter's experience and writings has awakened him and his fellow *americanos* a new pride and vision of their world and so that they could fight for their independence.
- 1822              Bolívar attempts to scale Mount Chimborazo (20,702 ft high) in Ecuador. In Andrea Wulf's biography of Alexander von Humboldt (2016), she says this about Bolívar's climb up this volcano: "As he ascends the majestic Chimborazo, Bolívar uses the volcano as an image of his fight to free the Spanish colonies. As he climbs up further, he leaves behind Humboldt's tracks and imprints his own into the snow. Then, as he battles with each step in the oxygen-deprived air, Bolívar has a vision of Time itself. Overcome by a feverish delirium, he sees the past and future emerging before him [...] It wasn't surprising that Chimborazo became Bolívar's metaphor for his revolution and destiny—even today the mountain is depicted on the Ecuadorian flag" (p. 157-158). After failing to reach the peak, he write his famous poem, "Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo."
- Nearly one million square miles were under Bolívar's control at this time.
- Bolívar meets with the Argentinian liberator, **José de San Martín**, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. San Martín decides to turn over the entire rebel army to Bolívar, and San Martín then leaves South America for good.
- 1823              The last Spanish forces are defeated in Venezuela.
- 1824              Bolívar commands the rebel forces in the great battle of Junín (August 6<sup>th</sup>) while Antonio José de Sucre defeats the last Spanish army at Ayacucho, Peru (December 9<sup>th</sup>).
- Bolívar marches to Cuzco, Peru, and Lake Titicaca and Potosí in Bolivia.
- 1825              Bolívar liberates Alta Peru, and it is named for him: Bolivia.
- Sucre becomes the first president of Bolivia.
- Bolívar returns to Lima, then to Bogotá.

### THIRD PHASE OF BOLÍVAR'S LIFE

- 1825-1830      There is violent and bitter factionalism through all of northern South America.
- 1827            Bolívar leaves Venezuela for the last time and goes to Colombia.
- 1828            To solve the political impasse Bolívar proclaims himself dictator on August 27<sup>th</sup>.  
Bolívar's lover, Manuela Sáenz, helps save him from an assassination attempt.
- 1828-1830      Uprisings break out all over Gran Colombia.
- 1830            Simón Bolívar resigns his presidency (dictatorship).  
He dies of tuberculosis on December 17<sup>th</sup> at La Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino in Santa Marta, Colombia.
- 1842            Bolívar's remains were moved to a Panteón Nacional (National Pantheon) in Caracas. The current monument was built in 1876.  
For a website dedicated to the monument where Simón Bolívar is buried, click on the following image:

