

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-62861-8 - Address to the Venezuelan Congress at Angostura  
February 15, 1819  
Simon Bolivar  
Frontmatter  
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**Cambridge Plain Texts**

SIMON BOLIVAR  
ADDRESS  
TO THE  
VENEZUELAN CONGRESS  
AT ANGOSTURA  
*February 15, 1819*

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## NOTE

SINCE the history of Latin America is prescribed as part of Spanish studies in the University, it is fitting that one of the Spanish texts should emanate from Latin America. Bolívar's address has been chosen both as a historical document and as a characteristic piece of prose. Its occasion demands a brief explanation.

The Captaincy-General of Caracas or of Venezuela, from its establishment in 1742 as a distinct government (extended and reorganized in 1777) subsisted for 80 years under the system of Spanish rule. Miranda, "Precursor of Emancipation," in vain attempted to rouse revolt in 1806. Notwithstanding some infiltration of new ideas, Venezuela remained an acquiescent dependency of the Spanish Bourbon monarchy until the subversion of that monarchy by Napoleon in 1808. In July, 1808, the announcement of the accession of Joseph Bonaparte produced an outburst of indignation in Caracas, and Ferdinand VII was there proclaimed King amid general enthusiasm. In April, 1809, the municipality of Caracas formed a Junta "to preserve the rights of Ferdinand VII" and asserted the "right of the Provinces of America to govern themselves in the absence of a general government." The Junta sent two envoys to London to solicit British support; one of them was Simón Bolívar, a childless widower of 29, a wealthy member of the old Creole aristocracy, who had travelled extensively in Europe.

The improvised Regency of Spain treated the movement as rebellion. The logic of events and the efforts of a few revolutionaries also pointed to separation. A Venezuelan Congress, which assembled in March, 1811,

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“in the name of Ferdinand VII,” issued, three months later, a Proclamation of Independence—the first assertion of complete independence by any Latin-American country. The Congress then drew up a “Federal” Constitution with a Triumvirate as Executive Power, a scheme totally unsuitable and tending to division rather than to union.

This first republican phase was brief. In March, 1812, an earthquake spread destruction in the capital and in other cities. An expedition from the still royalist western provinces met with little resistance. The fortress of Puerto Cabello was abandoned by its commander Bolívar, who went into exile. The ruined capital passed to the royalists.

Thenceforth Bolívar devoted life and fortune to the “patriot” cause. In New Granada, which had now assumed independence, he raised troops for the invasion of Venezuela and fought his way to the capital, which he entered in August, 1813, as “Libertador.” A year later, in July, 1814, Caracas fell a second time before royalist reaction: Bolívar was once more an exile. In April, 1815, a Spanish expedition reached Venezuela under General Morillo, who, finding the Venezuelan towns already reduced, passed westward to reconquer New Granada. In 1816 the separatist movement in tropical America appeared to be crushed.

However, bands of *guerrilleros* still kept alive a sporadic struggle. In December, 1816, a flotilla from the Antilles brought munitions and some reinforcements under Bolívar, who was recognized by improvised assemblies as “Supreme Chief of the Republic.” He effected some cooperation among the guerrillas, and in July, 1817, took Angostura (now Ciudad Bolívar) a port on the Lower Orinoco, which became the temporary

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capital, and seat of a provisional government. During the following 18 months the republicans made little progress, and a campaign, which aimed at recovering the northern region and the capital, failed completely. Yet future advance was being prepared by the enlistment of troops in the British Isles and by the election of a Congress to meet at Angostura in January, 1819. Bolívar's address to this Congress proudly ignores the fact that the royalists held most of Venezuela and New Granada, and he assumes the firm existence of the Republic whose political future he traces.

His confidence in victory was justified. In 1819 he marched westward over the Andes to the emancipation of New Granada, thence to return to Venezuela and win decisive victory in 1821. The following three years were devoted to completing the emancipation of Quito, Peru and Bolivia by cooperation with the southern movement which had started from Buenos Aires. But his political hopes were disappointed. Before his premature death in 1831, the three countries, Venezuela, New Granada, Quito, which he had striven to weld together, fell apart and relapsed into disorder. Yet, though he attempted more than was possible then, his political work has not been wasted and means much to those of his countrymen who aim at orderly and stable reconstitution.

There is an extensive literature concerning Bolívar. The *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. x, ch. 9 gives a brief narrative of the movement of emancipation. Fuller accounts are F. L. Petre, *Simón Bolívar* (London, 1910), Larrazabal, *Vida del Libertador Simón Bolívar* (Editorial America, 1918); *Memorias del General O'Leary* (Editorial America, 1915).

F. A. KIRKPATRICK