

## SIMÓN BOLÍVAR

Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios, (July 24, 1783 – December 17, 1830), more commonly known as Simón Bolívar, was one of the most important leaders of Spanish America's successful struggle for independence from Spain. He is a very important figure in South American political history, and served as President of Gran Colombia from 1821 to 1830, President of Peru from 1824 to 1826, and President of Bolivia from 1825 to 1826.

Bolívar was born into a wealthy family in Caracas, in what is now Venezuela. Much of his family's wealth came from silver, gold and copper mines. Later in his revolutionary life, Bolívar used part of the mineral income to finance the South American revolutionary wars.

After the death of his parents, he went to Spain in 1799 to complete his education. He married there in 1802, but his wife died of yellow fever on a short return visit to Venezuela in 1803. Bolívar returned to Europe in 1804 and for a time was part of Napoleon's retinue.

Bolívar returned to Venezuela in 1807, and, when Napoleon made Joseph Bonaparte King of Spain and its colonies in 1808, he participated in the resistance juntas in South America. The Caracas junta declared its independence in 1810, and Bolívar was sent to Britain on a diplomatic mission.

Bolívar returned to Venezuela in 1811. In March 1812, he left Venezuela after an earthquake destroyed Caracas. In July 1812, junta leader Francisco de Miranda surrendered to the Spanish, and Bolívar had to flee. In 1813, Bolívar led an invasion of Venezuela.

Caracas was retaken on August 6, 1813, and the Venezuelan Second Republic was proclaimed. There was a rebellion in 1814 and the republic fell. Later that same year, Bolívar commanded a Colombian nationalist force and entered Bogotá in 1814, recapturing the city from dissenting republican forces. He intended to march into Cartagena and seek the aid of local forces in order to capture Royalist Santa Marta. However, after a number of political and military disputes with the government of Cartagena, he fled to Haiti in 1815. He befriended the leader of the newly independent country. Bolívar was given sanctuary in Haiti, and asked the Haitian leader Alexandre Pétion for aid.

In 1817, Haiti helped Bolívar on the condition that he abolish slavery. Bolívar landed in Venezuela and captured Angostura (now Ciudad Bolívar). A victory at the Battle of Boyacá in 1819 added New Granada to the territories free from Spanish control, and on September 7, 1821, after the victory over the Spanish monarchy, the nation of Gran Colombia was created. It was formed from the liberated Spanish colonies (a federation covering much of modern Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador). Bolívar was president.

## **SIMÓN BOLÍVAR**

*(continued)*

Further victories consolidated his rule over Venezuela and Ecuador respectively. After a July 1822 meeting with Argentine General José de San Martín, who had partially liberated Peru from the Spanish, Bolívar took over the task of fully liberating Peru. The Peruvian congress named him dictator of Peru, on February 10, 1824, enabling him to reorganize the political and military administration.

On August 6, 1825, at the Congress of Upper Peru, the Republic of Bolivia was created. Bolívar is thus one of the few men to have a country named after him. Bolivia's constitution reflected the influence of the French and Scottish Enlightenment on Bolívar's political thought, as well as that of classical Greek and Roman authors.

It was hard for Bolívar to maintain control of the vast Gran Colombia. During 1826, internal divisions sparked dissent throughout the nation and regional uprisings erupted in Venezuela. The fragile South American coalition appeared to be on the verge of collapse. In an attempt to keep the federation together as a single entity, Bolívar called for a constitutional convention during April 1828.

A great admirer of the American Revolution, Bolívar's dream was to create an American Revolution-style federation between all the newly independent republics, with a government set-up to recognize and uphold individual rights. However, this dream fell under the pressures of particular interests throughout the region, which rejected that model and allegedly had little or no allegiance to liberal principles.

To prevent a break-up, Bolívar wanted to implement a more centralist model of government in Gran Colombia, with some or all of the elements of the Bolivian constitution he had written. This was controversial and the deliberations met with strong opposition. The convention almost ended up drafting a document which would have implemented a radically federalist form of government, which would have greatly reduced the powers of the central administration.

Unhappy with this, Bolívar's delegates left the convention. The convention eventually failed due to grave political differences. Bolívar proclaimed himself dictator on August 27, 1828. He considered this as a temporary measure, as a way to reestablish his authority and save the republic. However, it increased dissatisfaction and anger among his political opponents. An assassination attempt on September 25, 1828 failed. Bolívar emerged physically intact from the event, but it nevertheless greatly affected him.

Dissident feelings continued, and there were new uprisings in New Granada, Venezuela and Ecuador during the next two years. Bolívar finally resigned his presidency on April 27, 1830, intending to leave the country for exile in Europe, possibly in France. He died before setting sail, of tuberculosis on December 17, 1830, in what is now Colombia. Although he had failed to unite the countries of Latin America, this "George Washington of South America" left a legacy of independence from the Spanish monarchy, contributing decisively to the independence of the present-day countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia, where he is often revered as a hero.