

Here is the fixed and cleaned-up version of the text:

****From "Message to the Congress of Angostura" by Simón Bolívar****

****Introduction****

In mid-February 1819, in the city of Angostura (today Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela) in the Spanish colonial Viceroyalty of New Granada, the Latin American rebel leader Simón Bolívar gathered with twenty-six other like-minded exiles and revolutionaries to create their own sovereign and independent nation. Those attending this Congress of Angostura were driven by several motives. For some, ideas made popular by European Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau led them to seek ways of forming a new type of social contract, an agreement between citizen and government establishing sovereignty. For others, it was the tyranny of Spanish imperial rule under Ferdinand VII that caused them to consider a drastic severance of their association with Spain. And for yet others, the example of the break-away British colonies to the north in forming the United States of America had shown a specific light on the pathway to self-rule.

Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) was born in Caracas, Venezuela, into a family whose wealth was derived from cacao plantations worked by enslaved Africans. The nineteenth century was a time of increased calls for independence in Latin America. Despite his traditional elite status and wealth, as a Creole (a Spaniard born in the Americas) rather than a Peninsular (a Spaniard born in the Iberian Peninsula), Bolívar was a second-class subject. This subjugation was further exacerbated by the Bourbon Reforms, an effort by the Spanish to streamline the administration of the colonies over the second half of the eighteenth century, which, among other policies, eliminated the most tangible benefits of Creoles, such as holding high offices in the colonial administration.

Though he was orphaned by the age of nine, his family fortune and name nevertheless meant that young Bolívar received a rigorous education. Indeed, for years he was tutored by a stream of well-respected educators, the most prominent of them being Simón Rodríguez, a well-traveled radical thinker who taught him the works of European Enlightenment philosophers. As a teen, Bolívar spent time in Europe where he experienced the aftermath of the French Revolution and the personal allure and martial prowess of Napoleon Bonaparte. Initially inspired by the possibilities posed by the example of revolutionary France, Bolívar was ultimately disheartened by Napoleon's turn toward political autocracy and warmongering. Can you think of other revolutionary heroes with complicated legacies? How do you navigate your admiration for people who have complicated legacies?

In 1807, the twenty-four-year-old Bolívar returned to Caracas. Soon afterward, Napoleon drove out the Spanish king and placed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne. In 1811, with the French interloper Joseph I wearing the crown and with many in the Spanish colonies uncertain as to where sovereignty actually rested, Bolívar joined the military forces assembling to fight for independence in the northern region of South America. Over the next several years, he ascended to command, and the fate of the armies that he led rose and fell. Bolívar was a classic caudillo, a charismatic leader with followers of religious faith and loyalty. Caudillos were a fixture in the region's political and military history throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries and ultimately proved a challenge to constitutional democratic-republican systems, that is, governments of popularly elected representatives. Bolívar was proclaimed by the people as "The Liberator," and as the battles raged, amid the chaos of war, he often assumed dictatorial powers. By the early months of 1819, his armies gained control of much of northern South America, and he called together the Congress of Angostura. Those assembled formed the Republic of Gran Colombia and named Bolívar its president.

In his "Message to the Congress of Angostura," excerpted here, Bolívar called upon the representatives to heed history and consider the natural consequences of the constraints imposed by the Spanish Empire on the colonized. As you read, take note of how Bolívar describes the impact of colonization upon the political acumen of the people of the Spanish colonies, especially the masses. What characteristics fostered by colonialism does Bolívar assert should be taken into consideration as the congress debates the nature of the representative democratic-republican government they should form once independence is achieved?

Bolívar also urges that while learning from the examples of history, the congress should also recognize that the people of the Spanish colonies should consider their own unique pasts as they decide the form of government that they will create. He goes on to emphasize that a large part of that past included lessons infused with "ignorance, tyranny, and vice" taught by "pernicious masters" and corrupted by the "Darkness" of slavery. Indeed, slavery and its malevolent influence had been a constant in his life. Notably, in 1815, military setbacks had forced Bolívar to flee the Spanish colonies, and he was granted asylum by the government of Haiti. There, the leaders of the new nation, the first created by a revolution of the self-liberated and formerly enslaved, provided Bolívar with much-needed supplies and munitions. Accordingly, the caudillo promised his benefactors that abolition would be part of his platform should he ever realize an independent South America. Enslaved people were promised their freedom for fighting on both sides of the independence struggle in South America, and the institution had mainly ended in the region prior to its 1865 abolition in the United States. Bolívar

did stand against slavery, as we see from his remarks, though that goal was one not easily nor immediately realized. In the "Message to the Congress of Angostura" how does Bolívar describe slavery?

Despite the optimism of the Congress of Angostura, the fight for independence raged on for several more years in South America. Most of the former Spanish colonies began their nationhood with efforts at representative governments, though the variations on that theme were myriad. Most of the region had broken free from Spain by 1825. Bolívar had hoped for a unified northern republic, but that was not to be, and by 1830 the Republic of Gran Colombia had fractured into the modern nations of Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. To the south, independence resulted in the creation of the nations of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The Portuguese colony of Brazil gained its independence in 1822. What might be some of the reasons that South America was not able to stand as a single nation but rather fractured into multiple countries after gaining independence?

****Alvis Dunn**
Department of History******

****Address Delivered by the Liberator in Angostura, on the 15th of February, 1819, at the Opening of the Second National Congress of Venezuela****

[. . .] And now that by this act of adherence to the Liberty of Venezuela, I can aspire to the glory of being counted among her most faithful lovers, permit me, Sirs, to state with the frankness of a true republican, my respectful opinion regarding the scope of this Project of a Constitution, which I take the liberty to submit, as a token of the sincerity and candor of my sentiments. As this is a question involving the welfare of all, I venture to believe that I have the right to be heard by the Representatives of the People. Well, I know that in your wisdom you have no need of counsel; I am also aware that my project may perhaps appear to you erroneous and impracticable. But, Sirs, receive with benevolence this work which is a tribute of my sincere submission to Congress rather than the outcome of a presumptuous levity. On the other hand, your functions being the creation of a body politic, and, one might say, the creation of an entire community surrounded by all the difficulties offered by a situation — a most peculiar and difficult one — the voice of a citizen may perhaps point out a hidden or unknown danger.

By casting a glance over the past, we shall see what is the basic element of the Republic of Venezuela. America, on becoming separated from the Spanish monarchy, found itself like the Roman Empire, when that enormous mass fell to pieces in the midst of the ancient world. Each dismembered portion formed then an independent nation in accordance with its situation or its interests, the difference being that those members established anew their former associations.

We do not even preserve the vestiges of what once we were; we are not Europeans, we are not Indians, but an intermediate species between the aborigines and the Spaniards — Americans by birth and Europeans in right, we are placed in the dilemma of disputing with the natives our titles of possession and maintaining ourselves in the country where we were born, against the opposition of the invaders. Thus, ours is a most extraordinary and complicated case. Moreover, our part has always been a purely passive one; our political existence has always been null, and we find ourselves in greater difficulties in attaining our liberty than we ever had when we lived on a plane lower than servitude because we had been robbed not only of liberty but also of active and domestic tyranny. Allow me to explain this paradox.

In an absolute régime, authorized power does not admit any limits. The will of the despot is the supreme law, arbitrarily executed by the subordinates who participate in the organized oppression according to the measure of the authority they enjoy. They are entrusted with civil, political, military, and religious functions; but in the last analysis, the Satraps of Persia are Persians, the Pashas of the Great Master are Turks, the Sultans of Tartary are Tartars. China does not send for her Mandarins to the land of Genghis-Khan, her conqueror. America, on the contrary, received all from Spain, which had really deprived her of true enjoyment and exercise of active

tyranny by not permitting us to share in our own domestic affairs and interior administration. This deprivation had made it impossible for us to become acquainted with the course of public affairs; neither did we enjoy that personal consideration which the glamour of power inspires in the eyes of the multitude, so important in the great revolutions. I will say, in short, we were kept in estrangement, absent from the universe and all that relates to the science of government.

The people of America, having been held under the triple yoke of ignorance, tyranny, and vice, have not been in a position to acquire either knowledge, power, or virtue. Disciples of such pernicious masters, the lessons we have received and the examples we have studied, are most destructive. We have been governed more by deception than by force, and we have been degraded more by vice than by superstition. Slavery is the offspring of Darkness; an ignorant people is a blind tool, turned to its own destruction; ambition and intrigue exploit the credulity and inexperience of men foreign to all political, economic, or civil knowledge; mere illusions are accepted as reality, license is taken for liberty, treachery for patriotism, revenge for justice. Even as a sturdy blind man who, relying on the feeling of his own strength, walks along with the assurance of the most wideawake man and, striking against all kinds of obstacles, cannot steady his steps.

A perverted people, should it attain its liberty, is bound to lose this very soon,

because it would be useless to try to impress upon such people that happiness lies in the practice of righteousness; that the reign of law is more powerful than the reign of tyrants, who are more inflexible, and all ought to submit to the wholesome severity of the law; that good morals, and not force, are the pillars of the law, and that the exercise of justice is the exercise of liberty. Thus, Legislators, your task is the more laborious because you are to deal with men misled by the illusions of error, and by civil incentives. Liberty, says Rousseau, is a succulent food, but difficult to digest. Our feeble fellow citizens will have to strengthen their minds much before they will be ready to assimilate such wholesome nourishment. Their limbs made numb by their fetters, their eyesight weakened in the darkness of their dungeons, and their forces wasted away through their foul servitude, will they be capable of marching with a firm step towards the august temple of Liberty? Will they be capable of coming close to it, admiring the light it sheds, and breathing freely its pure air?

Consider well your decision, Legislators. Do not forget that you are about to lay the foundations of a new people, which may someday rise to the heights that Nature has marked out for it, provided you make those foundations proportionate to the lofty place which that people is to fill. If your selection be not made under the guidance of the Guardian Angel of Venezuela, who must inspire you with wisdom to choose the nature and form of government that you are to adopt for the welfare of the people; if you should fail in this, I warn you, the end of our venture would be slavery.

The annals of past ages display before you thousands of governments. Recall to mind the nations which have shone most highly on the earth, and you will be grieved to see that almost the entire world has been, and still is, a victim of bad government. You will find many systems of governing men, but all are calculated to oppress them, and if the habit of seeing the human race led by shepherds of peoples did not dull the horror of such a revolting sight, we would be astonished to see our social species grazing on the surface of the globe, even as lowly herds destined to feed their cruel drivers. Nature, in truth, endows us at birth with the instinctive desire for liberty; but whether because of negligence, or because of an inclination inherent in humanity, it remains still under the bonds imposed on it. And as we see it in such a state of debasement, we seem to have reason to be persuaded that the majority of men hold as a truth the humiliating principle that it is harder to maintain the balance of liberty than to endure the weight of tyranny. Would to God that this principle, contrary to the morals of Nature, were false! Would to God that this principle were not sanctioned by the indolence of man as regards his most sacred rights!

Many ancient and modern nations have cast off oppression; but those which have been able to enjoy a few precious moments of liberty are most rare, as they soon relapsed into their old political vices; because it is the people more often than the

government that bring on tyranny. The habit of suffering domination makes them insensible to the charms of honor and national prosperity, and leads them to look with indolence upon the bliss of living in the midst of liberty, under the protection of laws framed by their own free will. The history of the world proclaims this awful truth!

Only democracy, in my opinion, is susceptible to absolute freedom. But where is there a democratic government that has united at the same time power, prosperity, and permanence? Have we not seen, on the contrary, aristocracy and monarchy rearing great and powerful empires for centuries and centuries? What government is there older than that of China? What republic has exceeded in duration that of Sparta, that of Venice? The Roman Empire, did it not conquer the world? Does not France count fourteen centuries of monarchy? Who is greater than England? These nations, however, have been, or still are, aristocracies and monarchies.

Notwithstanding such bitter reflections, I am filled with unbounded joy because of the great strides made by our republic since entering upon its noble career. Loving that which is most useful, animated by what is most just and aspiring to what is most perfect, Venezuela in separating from the Spanish Nation has recovered her independence, her freedom, her equality, her national sovereignty. In becoming a democratic republic, she proscribed monarchy, distinctions, nobility, franchises, and privileges; she declared the rights of man, the liberty of action, of thought, of speech, of writing. These preeminently liberal acts will never be sufficiently admired for the sincerity by which they are inspired. The first Congress of Venezuela has impressed upon the annals of our legislation with indelible characters the majesty of the people, so fittingly expressed in the consummation of the social act best calculated to develop the happiness of a Nation.

I need to gather all my strength in order to feel with all the reverence of which I am capable, the supreme goodness embodied in this immortal Code of our rights and our laws! But how can I venture to say it! Shall I dare profane by my censure the sacred tablets of our laws? There are sentiments that no lover of liberty can hold within his breast; they overflow stirred by their own violence, and notwithstanding the efforts of the one harboring such sentiments, an irresistible force will disclose them. I am convinced that the Government of Venezuela must be changed, and while many illustrious citizens will feel as I do, not all possess the necessary boldness to stand publicly for the adoption of new principles. This consideration compels me to take the initiative in a matter of the gravest concern, although there is great audacity in my pretending to give advice to the Counsellors of the People.

The more I admire the excellence of the Federal Constitution of Venezuela, the more I am persuaded of the impossibility of its application in our State. And, in my opinion, it is a wonder that its model in North America may endure so successfully and is not upset in the presence of the first trouble or danger. Notwithstanding the

fact that that people is a unique model of political virtues and moral education; notwithstanding that it has been cradled in liberty, that it has been reared in freedom and lives on pure liberty, I will say more, although in many respects that people is unique in the history of humanity, it is a prodigy, I repeat, that a system so weak and complicated as the federal system should have served to govern that people in circumstances as difficult and delicate as those which have existed. But, whatever the case may be, as regards the American Nation, I must say that nothing is further from my mind than to try to assimilate the conditions and character of two nations as different as the Anglo-American and the Spanish-American. Would it not be extremely difficult to apply to Spain the Code of political, civil, and religious liberty of England? It would be even more difficult to adapt to Venezuela the laws of North America. Does not the **Spirit of Laws** state that they must be suited to the people for whom they are made; that it is a great coincidence when the laws of one nation suit another; that laws must bear relation to the physical features of a country, its climate, its soil, its situation, extension, and manner of living of the people; that they must have reference to the degree of liberty that their constitution may be able to provide for the religion of the inhabitants, their inclinations, wealth, number, trade, customs, and manners? Such is the Code that we should consult, not that of Washington! [. . .]

Bolívar, Simón. **An Address of Bolívar at the Congress of Angostura: February 15, 1819** (version reprint ordered by the government of the United States of Venezuela, to commemorate the centennial of the opening of the Congress). Washington, DC: B. S. Adams, 1919. <https://archive.org/embed/addressofbolivar00boluoft.x>