CHAPTER TEN

Epilogue: History and Our Heroes—The Bolívar Legend

John Lombardi

I begin with a florid biographical entry from a prestigious Venezuelan historical dictionary:

> Bolívar, Simón. An incomparable and sublime figure in the history of the Americas, he had the privilege of possessing in the highest degree the gifts of a man of action and of intellect. His political and military career spans and dominates the history of the southern continent from the Caribbean to the Pacific Andes. In twenty years of incessant activity, he conceives, realizes, and directs the independence of what are now the republics of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and what became Panama. He not only commanded the campaigns of a difficult and stubborn war against the Spanish empire, but he also created the form and the institutions for a new organization for all of Hispanic America. He saw the continent whole and came to express, in enlightened documents still completely valid, the grandest and most penetrating concepts about America's realities and its future possibilities. The innovation and profundity of his thought were enhanced by an exceptional literary style. He employed one of the most brilliant and effective prose styles of his time with mastery and expressive energy.
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> What he achieved in his short existence is beyond measure, what he left as political thought and a vision for the American future is incomparable, and for the most part still current. More than all the exalted titles that he received in his lifetime, such as General of the Armies, Supreme Chief, President of Republics, he is known as The Liberator, and as such continues at the forefront of the American consciousness.[1]

History and Heroes

History treats our heroes badly. We seek in their lives messages, answers, and inspiration far beyond anything they themselves lived. We create idealized structures to hold their achievements, and we exaggerate or diminish their importance and roles in our past to serve the immediate benefits our present requires. We historians find consistency of evaluation difficult to achieve. One generation's heroic figure becomes the next generation's villain, only to experience resurrection when the next movement or leader requires a symbol. People whose work in its time changed their world become in our time justification for behaviors they could not have imagined. When their homeland adopts a hero as the official symbol of all that is good and magnificent about national culture and achievement, the burden of official canonization often overwhelms actual historical significance, turning the hero into a malleable caricature of the current national enthusiasm, to serve as patriotic support for successive versions of an immediate political agenda.

Simón Bolívar is one of these badly treated heroes. Few national figures have suffered as much from popular and official concern as the Venezuelan Liberator, whose own name often disappears in favor of this, his favorite title. A man with a remarkable complement of talents, Bolívar enjoyed a moment of exceptional significance during the readjustment of Atlantic civilization that deconstructed Spain's American Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A major historical figure from perhaps 1819 to 1830, a mere decade, Simón Bolívar nonetheless left a legacy of such attractive power that he remains, today, one of the few leaders of this historical transformation with an internationally recognizable name. Indeed, his political and cultural currency appears as much alive today, over a century and a half later, as at any time since his death in 1830. The dedication of the Maury A. Bromsen-Simón Bolívar Room at the John Carter Brown Library provides an opportunity to reflect on our complicity in the invention of the Bolívar mythology.

As often happens to the resident enthusiast, my iconoclastic students often say, "What's so great about Bolívar?" Resistant as so many of us are to the exaggeration of advertised commodities, and sated with the instant invention and subsequent destruction of media stars and evanescent political figures, our students find themselves predisposed to reject the apparently naive Bolivarian enthusiasm of many Spanish American and in particular Venezuelan colleagues. Without knowing much about the history of his time, my students usually reject the notion of exceptionalism and prefer analysis that deflates the heroic proportions of Simón Bolívar to the normal human dimensions that we see reflected in the tame and generally cautious public figures around us.

The Heroic Bolívar and the Origins of His Legend

Yet, the Bolivarian legend grows, changing in various ways to match the needs of the times, but durable, substantial, and resistant to the ravages of debunking and muckraking. Bolívar the legend lives on, stronger than almost any other heroic figure of his time. Bolívar outpaces José de San Martín, George Washington, and Miguel Hidalgo, remaining current and rhetorically relevant well beyond the reach of a European hero like Napoleon or such Latin American contemporaries as José Antonio Páez or Juan Manuel de Rosas (figures with longer chronological trajectories and perhaps greater significance for the formation of their respective nations).

Discovering Bolívar as an outside observer, and engaging his legend through the process of more or less disciplined historical research, I too have wandered, amazed, through the extraordinarily extensive literature on Simón Bolívar and his times. What drives this intellectual obsession? What nurtures the Venezuelan national fixation on *El Libertador*? What informs the multinational Latin American engagement with this person? To be sure, Venezuelans have evolved the cultivation of the legend to a fine art, far surpassing any of their colleagues in the Bolivarian republics of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, or Peru. Yet even there, Bolívar lives on in their histories, a current and future presence all out of proportion to the length of his engagement with their past. Nonetheless, the national commitment to the invention and reinvention of Bolívar sets Venezuela apart from its neighbors. Indeed, as Germán Carrera Damas demonstrated a generation ago, the Venezuelan obsession with the official heroic cult reflects an ideological pathology of unusual depth.

Like all such legends, Bolívar's rises from an exceptional life in an exceptional time. When we scoff, as we moderns often do at the patriotic and enthusiastic exaggerations about Bolívar that run rampant through the Bolivarian bibliography, we can also fall into the overreaction of denying his moment its historical significance. Bolívar was real, his life and times occupied an important moment in the history of the Americas, and his trajectory deserves the attention of historians. The cults and mythmaking tell more about the history of Venezuela and its intellectual and political leaders than they do about the object of their veneration. The result of generations of worship, weak in analytical depth but strong in documentary preservation and publication, they provide us the optic to see through the swirling fog of self-interested, politically inspired demagoguery to identify the historically interesting elements of Bolívar's moment in world history.

Some explanations for the Bolivarian legends appear so obvious that we often skip past them, but perhaps we should not. Hagiography requires, at a

minimum, some lifetime of accomplishment to glorify. Bolívar survived the many vicissitudes of the independence movement and, unlike so many of his counterparts such as the great llanero caudillo José Tomás Boves, or the exceptional Antonio José de Sucre, survived the battles and assassination attempts. Bolívar not only survived battles and assassinations, he also survived defeats. Where others of his generation fought, failed, and slipped off the main stage, Bolívar fought, failed, and returned to fight: time and time again. Survival and persistence, although not sufficient for building the legends born of heroism, constitute fundamental requirements. A hero must survive and engage the game long enough to achieve a record that can drive the mythology that comes later.

Timing in history as well as in romance is crucial. A hero requires a heroic moment. A Simón Bolívar in the time of Francisco de Miranda would likely not find the opportunities for heroic deeds, or like Miranda, his heroism would not provoke a sympathetic echo in the people. A Bolívar coming of age in 1840 would find the new republican stage of Venezuela far too limited for heroic behavior. An adult Bolívar in 1720 would not have been the legend we know, but instead might have suffered the fate of the precursors Manuel Gual and José María España and disappear into history's footnotes. For a hero, this timing is everything. If talent, vision, creativity, and genius matter, so too do the opportunities that history provides for their action. Today's merchant prince could have been yesterday's revolutionary leader had the opportunity and necessity appeared. Absent the opportunity, the merchant prince retires rich, leaving a legacy of accomplishment and other signs of intellectual and personal creativity, but not legendary behavior. For that we need an opportunity.

In history, accidents matter as well, although perhaps not on the large scale, for the independence of Spanish America was not an option but a process. Absent Simón Bolívar, Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, along with the rest of continental Spanish America, would eventually have left the Spanish Empire, but not following exactly the same pattern. The process that we now study in its detail and character owes much to the personal characteristics, the dreams and ambitions, and the abilities of the independence generation including Bolívar. They made the history we know, although others, in their absence, might also have made a similar history.

The critical accident for our story entails recognition that a Bolívar married and fulfilling a family destiny would likely not have been the persistent compulsive risk taker whose charismatic successes and failures give his legend its power and effectiveness. Some heroes live too long, permitting the corrosive power of time and fate to diminish their moment. Heroism is the stuff not of generations but of moments. Bolívar's death in 1830 left his

legacy of unfulfilled promise available for inspiration and imitation, unsullied by decades of pedestrian administrative institution building. History is unkind to those like José Antonio Páez who labor long. With time in the limelight, the chances of failure accelerate rapidly. Bolívar's brilliant decade of rise and fall gave us the romantic, the triumphant, and the tragic elements essential to an effective legend.

None of this takes anything away from the heroic nature of the Bolivarian experience, but it helps us recognize the fragility of this historical moment. In our hearts, we accept this truth. Indeed, this universal recognition of the delicate balance of opportunity, chance, risk, and human creativity adds intensity and focus to our image of Bolívar.

Historians, publicists, adventurers, demagogues, and opportunists use many techniques to help us imagine that Bolívar and his achievement represent something permanent in the destiny of the Venezuelan people. We exaggerate the length of his historical moment by seeking in his early life signs of future greatness, in hopes, we think of identifying a solid, human predictability to the creation of a hero. We mark his emergence on the scene much earlier than our facts justify, extending the time of his influence. We want to believe that the Simón Bolívar who participates as a marginal actor in the events of the first republic in 1812 has already achieved the status of a major national figure. We avoid the question, "Would a Bolívar struck down by a bullet in 1818 before the critical developments in Angostura in 1819 be our national hero?" No, of course he would not. He would have been one of the many important figures of the time, significant as a representative of a class of actors but not identifiable as a transcendent leader. Not satisfied with our extension of the Bolivarian influence backward in time even into his childhood, we also extend his role forward in time well beyond the point of his influence. By projecting his impact timelessly and imaginatively into the future, we can imagine Bolívar driving the American agenda well beyond his death in 1830.

Many historians, and their readers, accept this extension of Bolívar's real life forward and backward in time because they want to believe that heroism comes from the personal qualities and circumstances of the hero. We invent our heroes because we want to believe that we too can make history. We resist the notion that history, as the combined phenomenon of many interrelated but often independently driven series of events, defies simple individualistic explanations. If we see history as an inexorable flow of events, with their directions and character determined not by what any one of us does but by what we all do and by the accidents that occur along the way, then the promise of our own lives becomes less significant.

If, however, we can believe that those among us who become heroes do so by virtue of special qualities, identifiable in their early years, and played out almost inevitably in their lifetimes, we can achieve two contradictory but satisfying explanations. On one side, we see the world changed by individual action, and this gives us reason to hope that within our own sphere we too can make an individual difference. On the other side, the great heroes have unique characteristics identifiable at birth and played out inexorably over their lifetimes, and this explains why we ourselves do not become heroes. Our failure as heroes is not for lack of will but for lack of the opportunities and special genius that come only to a few at rare moments in human history. We do not mind the contradictions of our approach; for one of the human mind's greatest talents is the capacity to sustain contradictory notions with great conviction. We want to believe that history responds to the actions of each of us as individuals and that our heroes arrive predestined to become what they are. The constructed Bolivarian legend nurtures both of these contradictory beliefs.

Simón Bolívar himself did much to help us with this process. Certain Bolivarian talents, trivial in some ways, nonetheless assist in creating the legend that is Bolívar. The man loved his words. He wrote everyone, all the time, about everything. Dictating to three scribes at the same time, three different letters on three different subjects, Bolívar's verbal creativity produced a torrent of documents in a short time that even today, with technology that opens the floodgates of words, amazes us with its volume and variety. Recognizing this unique characteristic, generations of literary prospectors captured a substantial portion of this Bolivarian productivity, and in one way or another, they made most of it available to scholars, or placed it in the hands of clever image makers, grist for the legend mill. Absent these materials, the work of studying the Bolívar legend would prove much more difficult. José Antonio Páez, in contrast, whose long public life produced only a fragment of materials compared with the avalanche of words and paper generated by Bolívar's short career, left us little to work with were we interested in creating a Paecista legend.

More even than the volume of these materials, however, it is the content that gives us an opportunity to create the legend. Whatever else we want to say about Simón Bolívar, the man had a flexible, creative, and interesting mind. He cared and wrote about everything, from the mundane and essential issue of recruitment and management of foot soldiers to the cosmic discussion of global politics. Unusual among heroic figures of action, Bolívar's writings reveal a man enthralled with the possibilities of his time and captivated by the opportunity history presented him. Self-conscious of his own historical

presence, as aware of how he would look from afar as he was of how he looked to his troops and contemporaries, Bolívar's sense of himself in history nourished his messianic style. He was a man driven by a personal recognition of his own special place in human events. In other times, such drive and self-awareness can produce saints and martyrs, eccentrics and explorers. In the moment of Spanish American independence, it produced the charismatic *héroe máximo*.

All of these things create for us the context of heroic legend, but they do not create the hero. In the end, after we have accounted for all the variables, after we have dealt with the time, the place, the opportunities, and the accidents out of which our heroes appear, we must engage the individual. Simón Bolívar's heroic image, exaggerated, distorted over the years in many different ways to serve many different contemporary political purposes, rests on an achievement we must capture. Many historians have sought this core truth of the heroic Bolívar.

Charismatic heroes speak to their followers directly. The key characteristic of the charismatic caudillo is the personal touch, the sense that each of us knows this leader personally, that the leader, however far away, appears close to us and accessible, and speaks directly to us. We believe in the charismatic leader, not because intellectually we think he is right, although we may, and not because we expect him to succeed, although we may believe it true, but because his talent, charm, drive, intensity, success, and inspiration capture us. We expect him to deliver miracles for us, and we believe in him, with an intensity that carries us beyond failure and past disillusionment or defeat.

Bolívar, like many other improvised leaders of the period, had this charismatic talent. It rises from the same source as his own self-absorbed conviction that he stood at the center of world events, an idea he projected to his followers and through his writings even to us, skeptical moderns that we are. Unlike other charismatic contemporaries, however, Bolívar rested his vision on a shrewd and deep understanding of the structure of Atlantic commerce, trade, and power and on the political, diplomatic, and economic opportunities of an independent Latin America. His education and European experience, far superior to most of his contemporaries and surely exceeded by none of the militarily successful caudillos of independence, allowed his messianic self-awareness to develop within a context of Atlantic real politics. As a result, he proved effective, capable of learning from his mistakes, and adept at taking advantage of his broader vision of world affairs. Skillful at speaking to his followers, he proved masterful at providing appropriate if different and inconsistent messages to constituencies as diverse as the Haitian revolutionary leadership and the conservative British political elite.

Bolívar also had endurance and stamina, another characteristic of the successful charismatic caudillo. The harsh physical world of South America offered a stage for a heroic pace of constant travel by horseback, multiple military campaigns over difficult terrain, and incessant engagement in the politics and logistics of large-scale military and diplomatic efforts. As historians charted the Bolivarian itinerary, which when plotted on any map and viewed in terms of the primitive conditions and roads overwhelms our modern imagination, the basis of the indestructible Bolivarian legends appears clearly. Success as a charismatic caudillo requires presence. Bolívar traveled endlessly on this large-scale South American stage, appearing everywhere to reconnect his followers to the charismatic presence and confound his enemies, substituting his personal charismatic credibility for the structure of government and stable institutions he hoped would eventually emerge.

Unlike many charismatic leaders, Bolívar had a purpose, a plan, and a goal. Not entirely clear at first, it appeared in the process of liberating Venezuela. This vision emerged from the understanding that he could not liberate Venezuela from Spanish imperial control except from a base in Colombia. It built on a recognition of the strategic importance of the Caribbean as a staging area for successive forays into the mainland. With Colombia and the Caribbean as context, Bolívar's vision for independence expanded rapidly to recognize the organic nature of the Spanish imperial structure and the necessity of extending the process of independence to encompass Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and, in a flight of Quixotesque romanticism, all of the Iberian colonial empire in America.

In many ways, of course, this extraordinary vision destroyed Bolívar's historical moment. Charismatic caudillos, because they must stay in touch with their people, often succeed best in smaller geographic space where the leader can maintain the sense of personal identification that their followers demand. Bolívar's vision, as it grew in scope, required his involvement in domains well beyond his ability to touch and control. His correspondence, although voluminous, helped him stay in touch but could not substitute for his personal presence. His loyal lieutenants could carry the message, but charisma itself is not transferable. In the later years, we find a Bolívar rushing from place to place, desperately attempting to maintain the charismatic linkages that supported his ambitions. Struggling to find a balance between the immediate realities of life in America and the metaconcept of his united American Empire, he relied more and more on the power of his presence, hoping to buy the time required to build the base for his imperial creation. His charisma succeeded in the moments his followers and enemies could see and feel his presence, but as other crises pulled him hither and yon, the effect dissipated, leaving the field to his enemies.

Bolívar wrote his vision into the physical record of letters, proclamations, and other documents, giving us a much clearer perspective on his ambitions and goals than we usually expect from a caudillo. The grander his vision and the more international its reach, the less relevance it had to his charisma-inspired followers. They followed the man; he spoke to history. In the end, he lost the link that binds the charismatic to his followers. His enemies, with plans of their own that spanned not the continent but their immediate region, replaced Bolívar because their plans matched their resources and addressed the immediate issues of their people, while Bolívar's perspective transcended his own time and place. As his health failed and his plans proved far more ambitious than his contemporaries could sustain, Bolívar survived yet another opportunity to die at the hand of his enemies, slipped off the active historical stage, and took the road to Santa Marta to die of natural causes along the way.

The National Mythology of Bolívar

When we return to the legend that is Bolívar and attempt to find the substance that sustains it generations beyond his time of political or military significance, we encounter an unusually acute hemispheric vision for America. His written word, validated by the spectacular success of his caudillesque military efforts, stands for his successors as a constant challenge for what they have not yet achieved. For a brief period after his death, they rejected his words, attempting to abolish his image from the national conversation, especially in Venezuela. Still, the very reach and power of his vision, the cause of his failure in real time, served as an effective base for the invention of a Bolívar myth that would serve for all time.

Unlike the real man, the content and direction of the myth belonged to the mythmakers, not the legend himself. Where Bolívar wrote his own history, often at the expense of others, his mythmakers recreated Bolívar in their own image and at their own service. The myth, like all such political and literary artifacts, offered the opportunity for endless renewal and reinvention to fit the needs and expectations of each powerful group that captured the legend for its purposes.

Every country has its heroes and myths; every nation creates and recreates popular images of its past heroic deeds to serve as cautionary or inspirational stories for its people. What, then, is the unique feature of the Bolivarian version of this classic nationalist cultural phenomenon? The simplicity of the image and its one-dimensional nature distinguishes the cult of Bolívar from other national mythologies (e.g., George Washington and Abraham Lincoln: the American Frontier and the Wild West). The Bolívar of the Venezuelan

national myth is an exquisitely detailed cardboard figure. One dimensional, covered in surface details that promise depth but never provide it, that announce significance but never demonstrate it, the Bolívar of Venezuelan orthodoxy transcends the historical myth to become, as Carrera Damas emphasizes, a semi-religious holy object—object, not person. By objectifying Bolívar, the mythmakers remove him from the realm of the exemplary human and translate him into the realm of the perfect object. Admired but irrelevant, refracted by current needs and reified for popular consumption, any human imperfections in the base material disappeared into the perfected Bolívar-object. Then, having invented this artifact, regime after regime repolishes, refashions, and remounts the object for public display and veneration as a symbol of national legitimacy. It is as if those who own the right to display the official Bolívar-object also own the crown and scepter of national power and authority.

Here, then, we have the Venezuelans' dilemma. Having invented Bolívar in the difficult and unstable times of the immediate postindependence generation, they lost the opportunity to invent a more complex and more serviceable national historical mythology. For a variety of historical reasons, the independence generation spent its historical capital in the postindependence wars in such a way that it left no one standing for reinvention as part of the national mythology. By virtue of rebellions and recycled regimes, each of the possible contenders for a major role in the national creation myth lost currency, left the public stage defeated but alive, or otherwise failed the tests required for heroic reincarnation. To fill the vacuum, Venezuelans turned to Bolívar, near enough and authentic enough to be theirs, but with a reach far enough and a trajectory long enough that almost anything could be made of his heroic moment.

Beginning in 1841, Venezuelans began investing all of their historical patrimony into the Bolívar myth. By the end of the century, they fully institutionalized the process, leaving no room for other national heroes to help carry the burden of national identity. Santiago Mariño was an invisible dissident, somehow not on the main track of Venezuelan national identity; José Antonio Páez, a true authentic national creator, was emptied of mythological significance by defeat after a long and successful political career but worst of all by a failed attempt to reclaim power after his time.

Venezuela thus has no impressive indigenous past to bridge the mythological anomaly of the colonial period and no grand colonial history to serve as a foil for the independence itself. Venezuela found itself entrusting its national identity into the charismatic hands of an extraordinary native son. Although Bolívar surely is an authentic Venezuelan product, as a touchstone of national identity he presents some problems. His primary theaters of action

were Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador; his most famous letter comes from Jamaica; his major constitutional creation served Bolivia, the only country to bear his name. When Venezuela affirms its identity as a separate nation, it does so in opposition to Bolívar. Indeed, Bolívar's primary contribution to this transcendent national moment is to leave the invention of the nation that became Venezuela to Páez while he himself rode off to pursue more important agendas elsewhere on the continent.

These circumstances make the challenge of inventing Bolívar as the single most significant touchstone for Venezuelan national identity even greater and may help explain the intensity of effort invested in the invention of Bolívar's myth. Most nations have multiple heroic pasts, multiple mythologies that form the base of their national identities. Most contestants for political power and privilege make ample and none too accurate use of these mythologies for their political purposes. In the United States we hearken back to Abraham Lincoln or Franklin D. Roosevelt, we speak of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, we admire Kit Carson and Sitting Bull, and we mythologize John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. Whatever the political occasion, we can seek in our historical recollections for the image that serves the purpose; and because our collections are rich and varied, our choices require only minimal distortion to serve their exhortatory and inspirational purposes.

Venezuela's contenders for national political power and privilege found themselves trapped into an overreliance on the Bolivarian myth for the symbols and references of inspiration and exhortation. As Venezuela's sense of its identity in the world expanded through the growth of literacy, radio, and television, and all the media, the sophistication of its people rose and the cardboard Bolívar of the past no longer presented the inspirational power it once did. Even so, the myth still carries some totemic value, not much, but some. We now have the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a contemporary innovation that caused only a ripple of commentary in the Venezuelan press (and some of that to point out the irrelevancy of the gesture).

As the old Bolivarian myth weakens, it leaves in its wake an opportunity to recapture the spirit and drive of the many heroes of the Venezuelan century of transition (1750–1850) as the legitimate source of national identity. It frees Venezuelans to identify in their rich historical past a wider array of images and heroic figures from which to invent a much more effective and complex national mythology. The artificial and constrained boundaries that fix the origins of Venezuela in the independence decades give far too little credit to those in the previous century who actually invented the political entity that would become Venezuela. A historical explanation for Venezuela's modern life that begins only in the confusing days of 1810, as the

Bolívar myth would have it, cannot accurately project the fundamental structure of Venezuela's national identity. That artifact comes as a product of the previous century's reorganization of Spanish imperial trade and governance.

Venezuela begins with the Caracas Company, with the Audiencia of Caracas, with the redefinition of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions for the bishopric and archbishopric of Caracas, not with the revolutionary meetings of 1810, or with the dramatic events of 1812, or with the fall of Puerto Cabello in November of 1823. The fort at Araya and the Caribbean contraband trade in cacao define Venezuela. Páez confirmed this Venezuela, with all its structural anomalies, its economic tensions, and its geographic fragmentation, as an independent republic in 1830. With Bolívar in perspective, recognizing that his role belongs on a continental stage rather than a Venezuelan stage, and with a broader, more comprehensive, and more accurate complement of historical antecedents to examine, Venezuela can find in its past the consistent lines of development and conflict that define it today.

Note

1. *Diccionario de historia de Venezuela*, 3 vols. (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1988), I:397.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Beginning to Read about Bolívar

John Lombardi

The interest of Venezuelans and other scholars in the life and times of Simón Bolívar has produced and continues to produce a flood of materials, commentary, publication, and republication of Bolvariana that pours from the presses of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and other countries to a lesser degree. Clustered around symbolic dates associated with the birth and death of the Liberator, the river of materials never stops, and when one might imagine that scholars have said it all, another Bolívar anthology appears. Each publication seeks to find just the right perspective, just the correct nuance to convey the essential nature of the man and his time, the man and his significance for today, or the man and his relevance to almost every imaginable topic. What follows here is a guide to some of the important and useful works that serve as an introduction to this extensive literature. Most of the materials for an understanding of Bolívar exist in Spanish, but included in this chapter are the key works in English that can serve as a comprehensive introduction to the topic.

In the mid 1970s, a project to construct a comprehensive working bibliography of Venezuelan history[1] included a highly selective group of Bolívar entries numbering just under 300 titles. In the generation since then, an equivalent effort would surely produce at least that number of significant new titles about or by Bolívar. The elegant and scholarly work by Blas Bruni Celi, *Venezuela en 5 siglos de imprenta*,[2] offers another perspective on Bolivarian bibliography with the inclusion of a large number of works published about or by Bolívar outside of Venezuela before 1930. Simple searches in electronic

indices turn up thousands of titles, and although many represent ephemera or reprints and reeditions of well-known items, nonetheless, the international Bolívar industry continues its work at a steady pace. The following review serves more as a sampler of Bolvariana than either a critical review of the literature or a comprehensive guide to Bolívar materials, neither of which would fit in the space provided. A classic introductory bibliography for those willing to begin the Bolivarian quest is *Simón Bolívar, 1783–1830: bibliografía básica*, by Manuel Perez Vilas.[3]

Bolívar, like all great men, attracted his biographers. Taken together, each within a particular worldview and a historical perspective, these works give us multiple Bolívars, connected by the verifiable skeleton of the dates, time, places, events, and people of his life but distanced one from the other by the interpretations and significance attached to this common structure. Gerhard Masur's *Simón Bolívar*[4] and Augusto Mijares's *El Libertador*[5] presented what served for many years as the standard version of the life and times of the great man. Others, of course, had a different view. Although many Bolívar versions exist, perhaps the tone of the controversy can be captured by following the reading of the Mijares work with the *Bolívar* of Salvador de Madariaga.[6] Madariaga's portrayal of an ambitious, scheming, opportunistic, monarchist Bolívar scandalized many Venezuelans. These and other biographies such as Indalecio Liévano Aguirre's *Bolívar*[7] or José Luis Salcedo-Bastardo's *Visión y revisión de Bolívar*[8] all sought to find the right perspective on this larger-than-life individual.

English-speaking scholars, with some exceptions, avoided Bolívar as a subject, in part because the Masur work occupied this intellectual space and in part because the fashion of professional historians writing biographies of famous men faded from the North American university graduate school model. Biography continued to have currency with the English-reading public, but academic scholars turned to a different range of monographic studies. Although this produced some exceptionally well-documented work, its fragmentary nature and its reluctance to engage the continental issues posed by a Bolívar focus limited its value in the great Liberator debates. An exception to this absence of full treatments of Bolívar appeared in Donald E. Worcester's Bolívar,[9] which proved a significant contribution to the field.

Some decades later, the English-reading public received two additional major publications offering outstanding perspectives on Bolívar. The first exceptional work came from the pen of David Bushnell in his *Simón Bolívar: Liberation and Disappointment*,[10] which builds on his long engagement with the issues of nation building after independence as demonstrated in *The Santander Regime in Gran Colombia*[11] and Bushnell's subsequent volume edited for North American university students, *The Liberator Simón Bolívar: Man*

and Image.[12] The second major contribution appeared in 2006 in John Lynch's *Simón Bolívar: A Life*.[13] This fine work provides the English-reading public with an excellent biography that builds on Lynch's other work on the period, which appeared in his *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808–1826*[14] and *Caudillos in Spanish America: 1800–1850*[15] as well as his work on the Argentine dictator, *Juan Manuel de Rosas, 1829–1852*.[16] For the work of others who have written in English on late colonial and early nineteenth century Gran Colombian themes see, for example, Frank Safford's classic *The Ideal of the Practical: Colombia's Struggle to Form a Technical Elite*[17] and Thomas Millington's *Colombia's Military and Brazil's Monarchy: Undermining the Republican Foundations of South American Independence*,[18] which give the English-reading audience context and structure.

The guardians of Bolívar's fame worked diligently to rectify the deviant views of some and support the orthodoxy of others in a number of extraordinary publications, perhaps the best known of which is Vicente Lecuna's *Catálogo de errores y calumnias en la historia de Bolívar*.[19] Some misconceptions about Bolívar's intentions and spirit required more than a casual refutation or an article in the pages of the *Revista* of the Academia Nacional de la Historia de Venezuela or the *Boletín* of the Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela. Lecuna set the standard here with his *La entrevista de Guayaquil: cartas apócrifas sobre la Conferencia de Guayaquil*[20] in which he took on those whose documentary evidence for an unflattering picture of Bolívar in the famous meeting with San Martín he believed faulty.

If the polemics over the true history of Bolívar produced both serious scholarship and overwrought enthusiasm, they also provided the impetus for an incredible publication cycle of documents about and by Bolívar. Setting the tone for these monumental publications is *Documentos para la historia de la vida pública del libertador de Colombia, Perú y Bolivia*, edited by José Félix Blanco and Ramón Azpurúa.[21] Lecuna himself, along with many others, published collections of documents from the extraordinary volume of Bolivarian materials scattered about in the archives of America and Europe. Lecuna's *Cartas del Libertador*[22] served for a time as the canonical base for historical writing about the Liberator. Some years later, an even more ambitious project, headed by one of the country's premier Bolivarian apologists and devotees, Cristóbal Mendoza, and sponsored by the country's Sociedad Bolivariana, launched *Escritos del Libertador*,[23] aspired to be the complete definitive edition of Bolívar's writings. An excellent review of the documentary sources on Bolívar is *El Archivo de Bolívar: manuscritos y ediciones* by Pedro Grases.[24]

This extraordinary outpouring of materials, supplemented in many other smaller publications and studies, sought to capture a unique angle on the Bo-

livarian phenomenon. Lecuna compiled a fascinating detailed chronicle of Bolívar's military actions in *Crónica razonada de las guerras de Bolívar*.[25] Significant luminaries of the Venezuelan intellectual landscape found other topics to highlight the hero's trajectory through American space and time, as for example in Mario Briceño Perozo's *Reminiscencias griegas y latinas en las obras del Libertador*,[26] a piece presented to the Academia Venezolana de la Lengua as the author's thesis on the occasion of his induction into that distinguished body. The list of special topics that attract the Bolivarian scholar is endless, including the psychoanalytical aspects of Bolívar[27] and studies of the women in his life,[28] even capturing the imagination of the novelist.[29] Of course, not all of these works pass the test of serious scholarship. Others, recognizing the worldwide impact of Bolívar's presence, give us an important view from the other side of the Atlantic. Alberto Filippi's edited work *Bolívar y Europa en las crónicas, el pensamiento político y la historiografía*[30] and his *El Libertador en la historia italiana: ilustración, "Risorgimento," fascismo*[31] give a remarkable view of the Old World's understanding of the New World's Napoleon. Another international view comes from the commemorative volume *Simón Bolívar en el pensamiento universal*, which collects short biographies of Bolívar published in various national encyclopedias and similar reference books.[32]

The official commitment to Bolívar as national hero beyond all compare produced a further interesting phenomenon. At the same time that the official establishment in support of the Bolívar legend published Bolívar documents and defended the purity of their hero's history by engaging in elaborate polemics, it also launched an effective effort to capture the entire context of the Bolívar epic. True to their belief that Bolívar stood at the center of the American moment in World history, they invested generously in an effort to understand the basis of his greatness, reaching backward in time into Venezuela's colonial past and forward from independence into the nineteenth century. The beneficiaries of these efforts are all of us, for the documents and studies published under the auspices of the Academia Nacional de la Historia, primarily, but also under sponsorship of many other government institutes and entities as well as private foundations and corporations, deliver an incredible wealth of material to the historian for large parts of Venezuela's past.

Believing so firmly in the righteousness of their devotion to the Bolívar of mythological invention, recent generations supported research on a wide range of topics and the publication of documents of every type, confident that everything so delivered to the historical conversation would support, in the end, the exceptional character of the Liberator. For example, thanks to this commitment, Venezuelan historians have the incredible collections of the Biblioteca de la Academia Nacional de la Historia, *Fuentes para la historia colonial de Venezuela*, that now reaches over 250 volumes of documents

and monographs on every imaginable aspect of Venezuela's colonial period from the moment of discovery until 1810. The Presidencia de la República published, in a similar vein, its immensely useful *Pensamiento político venezolano del siglo xix: textos para su estudio.*[33] Not to be outdone, the Oficina Central de Información published its own series focused on the nineteenth-century Federal Wars called *Ezequiel Zamora y su tiempo* beginning in the mid 1970s. Although much of this activity produced relatively little new scholarship, and often reproduced the works of a previous generation, it nonetheless provided Venezuelanists with ready access to important materials on the colonial and nineteenth-century history of Venezuela.

No conversation about the Bolívar cult can conclude without reference to the exceptional work of Germán Carrera Damas, whose *El culto a Bolívar*[34] launched a firestorm of controversy. This work, followed by a sequence of other studies driving a historiographically modernizing agenda from a base in the Escuela de Historia of the Universidad Central, changed the context of Venezuelan national historical scholarship. Although the worship of Bolívar continued apace, and although the rebirth of historical studies did not immediately overwhelm the country's intellectual elite, the work of Carrera Damas has had and continues to have a major impact on the writing and reading of national history. From a preoccupation with historical method,[35] Carrera Damas moved into a complex exploration of the Venezuelan national project, taken in true Bolivarian fashion, from a geographically wide and chronologically deep perspective. So successful was Carrera Damas's historiographical campaign that what began as an outsider's intellectually rigorous attack on official history became part of the national historical agenda.[36] Indeed, Carrera Damas published a short version of Bolívar's life, along with a selection of fundamental Bolivarian documents, in *Simón Bolívar: Escritos fundamentales.*[37]

All this, of course, but touches the surface of the sea of Bolívar and Bolívar-related materials in the archives and libraries of America and Europe, including a remarkable store of Bolivariana in the Maury Bromsen collection of the John Carter Brown Library. Although it may be possible to find a Spanish American republic that has not published some Bolivarian item, or a European country that has not been touched by the Bolívar myth, any such exceptions will be rare indeed. The Bolívar enthusiasm represented by the items mentioned here is but a sampler of the rich materials available. They provide the opportunity to move beyond the politically expedient cardboard fabrication to understand the events and processes in which Bolívar played such a significant part.

Notes

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29. Gabriel García Márquez, *El general en su laberinto* (Bogotá: Editorial Oveja Negra, 1989).
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34. Caracas: Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1969.
35. *Historia de la historiografía venezolana (Textos para su estudio)* (Caracas: UCV, 1961).
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37. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1982.