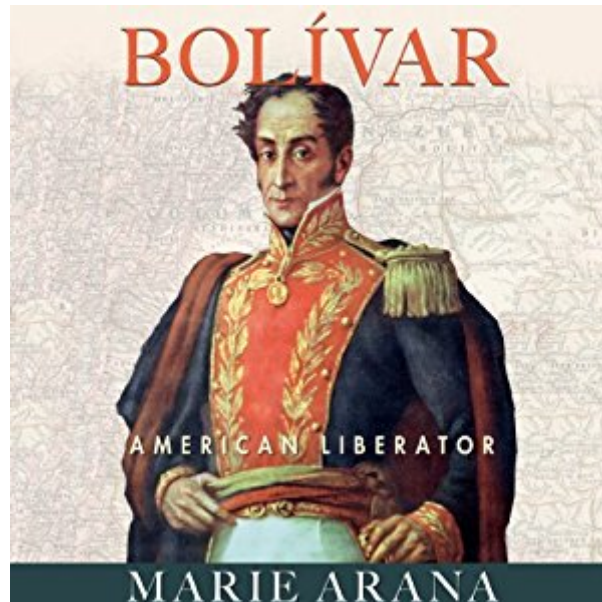




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Bolivar: American Liberator



Synopsis

It is astonishing that Simón Bolívar, the great Liberator of South America, is not better known in the United States. He freed six countries from Spanish rule, traveled more than 75,000 miles on horseback to do so, and became the greatest figure in Latin American history. His life is epic, heroic, straight out of Hollywood: he fought battle after battle in punishing terrain, forged uncertain coalitions of competing forces and races, lost his beautiful wife soon after they married and never remarried (although he did have a succession of mistresses, including one who held up the revolution and another who saved his life), and he died relatively young, uncertain whether his achievements would endure. Drawing on a wealth of primary documents, novelist and journalist Marie Arana brilliantly captures early 19th-century South America and the explosive tensions that helped revolutionize Bolívar. In 1813 he launched a campaign for the independence of Colombia and Venezuela, commencing a dazzling career that would take him across the rugged terrain of South America, from jungles to the Andes mountains. From his battlefield victories to his ill-fated marriage and legendary love affairs, Bolívar emerges as a man of many facets: fearless general, brilliant strategist, consummate diplomat, passionate abolitionist, gifted writer, and flawed politician. A major work of history, Bolívar colorfully portrays a dramatic life even as it explains the rivalries and complications that bedeviled Bolívar's tragic last days. It is also a stirring declaration of what it means to be a South American.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

+For anyone interested in the great Age of Enlightenment that was the end of the 18th century--a time that rocked and changed nations across the Americas as they separated from their Mother Countries and the monumental quake that shook the monarchies of Europe, should be fascinated by this eye-opening book. Most people in the north of the Americas were too busy getting their fledgling countries going to notice much what was going on to the south. However, John Quincy Adams and James Monroe here in the U.S. were aware that what was happening in Venezuela and the northern countries of South America was an almost exact parallel to what was going on here in the new United States. From that point on, the paths diverged dramatically. But in the end, the new North American government, busy with its own dealings with Spain, paid no more than superficial attention to the bloody struggles of its southern neighbors. Marie Arana has done a masterful job of bringing to life the leader of that revolution to the south, a man characterized as 'bigger than life' and by Jose Marti, one noted Hispanic writer in the typical flowery rhetoric of the times as, "...of Bolivar you can only speak from mountaintops, or amid thunder and lightning, or with a fistful of freedom in one hand and the corpse of tyranny at your feet." Ms. Arana brings Simon Bolivar down to earth in a highly readable, impressively researched manner. In the process she throws important light on the sometimes puzzling and little understood attitudes and realities of race and social class that still plague the southern continent. For anyone who wishes to understand "Latinos" or "Hispanics" better (reference the growing importance they have right here in the USA), this really is must reading. And, incidentally, the kindle version of this book reads beautifully.

A North American reading about Simon Bolivar cannot help but draw comparisons between rebellions against colonialism on both the American continents. We in the United States are raised with an awareness of British injustices in our colonial past, but these seem benign when we read of the harshness and brutality of the Spanish colonizers. Bolivar was one of several prominent leaders of the rebellion against the Spanish in the early 1800s (the other most notable being Jose de San Martin of Argentina), and he became the enduring symbol for all of them. The various movements against the Spanish involved trade-offs and compromises with the royalists; as the independence movement gathered momentum, compromise became less and less of an option. After the colonizers were finally ejected from South America, the turmoil continued in the form of intense power struggles -- to the point that even Bolivar himself pondered whether the rebellion had all been worth it. While the post-colonial United States had its own struggles, these did not nearly reach the pitch of those in South America. During and after his life, Bolivar was regarded as both a hero and a tyrant, and he was hardly a saint. Like many leaders, he evolved and he encompassed many

dimensions. In at least one situation in the colonial period he found it expedient to declare a death sentence on royalists, and in the post-colonial period he believed it was in the public interest for him to hold dictatorial powers in opposition to those who advocated more "liberal" and democratic ideals -- even as he rejected the concept of monarchy. We might find much to criticize in Bolivar. But as Marie Arana reminds us in the epilogue, it is remarkable that while Washington and Jefferson tolerated slavery in the United States, Bolivar was firm about the fundamental link between fighting for the liberation of a continent and banning the enslavement of human beings. And while he was often accused of self-aggrandizement, in the course of his efforts he let go of his privileged birth and upbringing and sacrificed his wealth to the struggle -- generously giving to benefit the revolution and individual rebel soldiers; he was born in wealth and died in poverty. Marie Arana has done a thorough job of telling the story. It is certainly not dry, but nor is it easy to sort out, due to the "strange bedfellows" of politics. One particular suggestion I would have made to the author would have been to include a few maps to help the reader get better oriented to the setting.

Marie Arana's Bolivar was captivating from beginning to end. As a Mexican-American educator, it was an eye-opening experience for me to read about a man who accomplished so much in his short life. A case has been made for Latinx in the U.S. and their lack of heroes. Here is one we can look to for inspiration! Like all heroes, he comes with many major flaws but we cannot deny his grit, determination, and unyielding will to cast out the Spanish throne from Latin America and create a unified country that would rival any super power at the time. His story also foreshadows the Latin America we know today. You will not be disappointed with Bolivar: American Liberator!

This was a fantastic read and in depth view of Simon Bolívar's life and challenges he faced! I've been to Central and South America and wish I would've found this book 5 years ago. Marie has a great style of writing and keeps you engaged from the first chapter. There were no glossing over facts in this book and I appreciate that to the fullest. Due to the fact of so much detail in this book there were many times that I had to read 1 chapter and take a break and come back to the book at other times. The English audience would do well to read this as Marie does a great job in tying in differences between US issues and American (Bolivar's America that is) issues and how dissimilar they really were. A great find and will be recommending this to family and friends.

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