

Excerpts from Simon Bolívar's Speech at Angostura, 1819

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.

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 merging of New Granada and Venezuela into one Great State, has been the unanimous wish of the peoples and the government of both republics.... I feel myself carried away, and I see her in the very heart of the universe, stretching along her lengthy shores between two oceans which Nature has separated, but which our country unites through long wide channels. I can see her as the bond, as the center, as the emporium of the human family. I can see her sending to all the corners of the globe the treasure hidden in her mountains of silver and gold; I see her sending broadcast, by means of her divine plants, health and life to the sufferers of the old world; I see her confiding her precious secrets to the learned who do not know how much her store of knowledge is superior to the store of wealth bestowed by Nature upon her; I can see her sitting on the throne of liberty, the scepter of justice in her hand, crowned by glory, showing the old world the majesty of the modern world.

Let us not be presumptuous. Legislators, let us be moderate in our pretensions. It is not likely that we should attain that which humanity has not succeeded in attaining, what the greatest and wisest nations never attained. Indefinite liberty, absolute democracy are the rocks upon which all republican hopes have been wrecked. Cast your eye over the ancient republics, the modern republics, the rising republics; almost all have tried to establish themselves as absolute democracies.