

SIMÓN BOLÍVAR (1783–1830)

THE ANGOSTURA ADDRESS (FEBRUARY 15, 1819)

Our societies hardly conserve a trace of what existed here before the Spanish came. Today, we are neither Europeans nor Indians, but rather a species intermediate between the two. American by birthright, European by legal inheritance, we are caught in the middle, having to maintain our position against the original inhabitants of *América*, on the one side, and against Spanish invaders, on the other. Even the land of our birth is not purely our own, an extraordinary complicated situation.

This is a consideration of vital importance. Let us remember that our people are not European, nor are they North American. Rather than being a direct offshoot of Europe, our people are a composite of Africa and *América*. This mixture began long ago in Spain, with its historical component of African blood and cultural influences, and today, properly speaking, it is impossible to assign us to any previously existing branch of the human family. Most of the indigenous people have been annihilated. Europeans have mixed with them and with the Africans who dwell here. The Africans have mixed with the indigenous and the Europeans. We are all children of the same mother, one could say, with different fathers come from afar, varying in blood and geographic origin, and so we differ visibly in the color of our skin.

According to our constitution, and following the laws of nature, all citizens of Venezuela enjoy complete political equality, whatever their color. This kind of equality may not have been consecrated in Athens, nor more recently in France or North America, and yet we must consecrate this principle in Venezuela precisely in order to compensate for the dissimilarities that I describe. Equality, in my opinion, legislators, is the most fundamental basis of our existing system. Those who have studied the matter generally agree that all men are born with equal rights to share the benefits of society. They agree, too, that men are not born with equal aptitude to attain high social rank, because all men should practice virtue, but not all do, all should be courageous, but not all are.

Venezuela has been, is, and should continue to be a republic, a government based on the sovereignty of the people, one that abolishes slavery, preserves civil liberties, maintains the separation of powers, and forever banishes monarchy and special privileges.

Unity, unity, unity must be our motto! Nothing can save our young Republic from the abyss if we do not meld our population into a cohesive nation. The blood of our citizens is varied, so let us mix it together in the name of unity. Let us likewise balance and unify our governing institutions, raise a temple to Justice, and, under its sacred inspiration, create a new constitution for Venezuela.

Slavery had long covered the face of Venezuela with its barbarous and awful cloak. Venezuelan skies hung heavily with storm clouds and threatened to rain upon us a deluge of fire. Therefore, invoking all that is holy and humane, I called forth redemption to disperse the tempest and break the fetters of the slaves. By that act, the slaves were freed and these embittered stepchildren of Venezuela became transformed into a new generation of grateful sons.

Taken from Simón Bolívar, “Bolívar’s Vision of an Orderly Republic: The Angostura Address,” in *Latin American Independence: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. and eds. Sarah C. Chambers and John Charles Chasteen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 136–146.