



# Simón Bolívar: A Life

*John Lynch*

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## **Simón Bolívar: A Life** John Lynch

Simón Bolívar was a revolutionary who freed six countries, an intellectual who argued the principles of national liberation, and a general who fought a cruel colonial war. His life, passions, battles, and great victories became embedded in Spanish American culture almost as soon as they happened. This is the first major English-language biography of “The Liberator” in half a century. John Lynch draws on extensive research on the man and his era to tell Bolívar’s story, to understand his life in the context of his own society and times, and to explore his remarkable and enduring legacy.

The book illuminates the inner world of Bolívar, the dynamics of his leadership, his power to command, and his modes of ruling the diverse peoples of Spanish America. The key to his greatness, Lynch concludes, was supreme will power and an ability to inspire people to follow him beyond their immediate interests, in some cases through years of unrelenting struggle. Encompassing Bolívar’s entire life and his many accomplishments, this is the definitive account of a towering figure in the history of the Western hemisphere.

## **Simón Bolívar: A Life Details**

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Author : John Lynch

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## **Hans says**

I am fascinated by Simon Bolivar. Thanks to my Euro-Centric Education I learned so very little about Latin America. This man is the Founding Father of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Boliva (which was named after him). He was like all the American Founding Fathers wrapped up into one person. Hard to believe, but it is true. He had the Brains of Madison, Stature of Washington, Charisma of Hamilton, Tenacity of John Adams, and Prose of Jefferson. He had a dream of creating the Republic of Greater Colombia, which he achieved temporarily, but alas the inhabitants didn't share his dream and in the end he saw his dream crumble. After much disillusionment he believed the Latin Americans weren't enlightened enough yet for a Republic and would need dictators to raise them out of their ignorant state.

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## **Carlos Alberto Ledezma says**

A very thorough and objective view of Simon Bolivar's life. The book serves not only as a biography but also as a roadmap to the war of independence of South America.

Lynch shows Bolivar as a military, a politician, a citizen, a philosopher and a human being. He explains very clearly his ideas and personality.

Ultimately, Lynch makes a great analysis of Bolivar's legacy, how his ideas have endured time and how politicians have perverted them for their own gain.

With a massive amount of historical references, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in American history.

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## **Alberto Ambard says**

Well, we all know that when it comes to biographies, British for some reason tend to write the best. This one is not exception: excellent research, deep understanding of the subject and the universal context surrounding Bolivar, his actions, his political views, his influences and the way he influenced others.

The text manages to be concise, yet very detailed and never boring. Of course, Bolivar's incredible story helps but there are so many other biographies about the Liberator that simply do not remotely match this one.

One very important aspect here is that the author avoided the typical "cult to Bolivar". He is objective and points out the greatness AND the weakness of the Venezuelan hero.

For those who know the character well, this is a great book because it gives a very objective perspective rarely seen. Moreover, since there is no political agenda, the universal figure is not manipulated at all.

For those who do not know Bolivar, be ready, this man greatly influenced people like Lord Byron (to name just one), led the liberation from Spain of 5 countries, cross the Andes by horse and wrote political and

philosophic manuscripts in many forms that influenced some of the most important thinkers that followed. Statues of his are spread all over the world.

John Lynch did an amazing job. Highly recommended

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## **Daniel Pardo says**

From the opening pages the reader gets the feeling that John Lynch is devoted to the subject matter, and he is knowledgeably qualified to write the book—he is Professor Emeritus of Latin American Studies at London University, and although titles do not automatically qualify the individual, Lynch's reputation and output are without reproach, and deserving of praise.

In this publication, Lynch's extensive research, and bibliography, help him present the hero, Simón Bolívar, with flaws and all, and gives us a glimpse at his complex nature without passing judgment. Bolívar, the man, the General, the President, is too overwhelming a subject to categorize. A paradox, Bolívar was the scion of an elite “Creole” family, and at the time one of the wealthiest men in Venezuela, yet he devoted his fortune to the cause of independence; at a time when strict racial divisions were the rule, Bolívar decreed the emancipation of slaves as early as 1816, yet he was fearful of the mixed race majority who, along with former slaves and the indigenous population, might emulate the Haitian revolt against the white Creole minority. Bolívar was a product of the Enlightenment, yet he maintained the colonial conservative notion of authoritarian power; a seeker of independence from European kings, yet one who favored a protective alliance with England, he believed in a hereditary Senate, and a life-long Presidential appointment. Bolívar had an immense ego, yet in private he was basically a quiet, humble individual, deferential to the trappings of government and society. Several times he was appointed Dictator, yet nothing gave him more pleasure than to be with the soldiers in battle.

Lynch manages to include as much information as possible on the protagonist, if with limitations. Lynch's style of writing is the kind which most people should appreciate: He is direct, objective, with a no nonsense attitude about the characters, and his presentation of the narrative. While there may be readers who find this style of writing too limiting, it is these traits which makes this biography worth reading. Lynch presents a general picture of an important figure far too long ignored by historians and authors in the United States, who have consistently avoided investing their talents outside of their own environment. Of the few other works on Bolívar, available in English, most are biased in one way or another, with a majority of them being negative, or focusing on irrelevant comparisons for their presentation. Prior to Lynch's book, the last biography on Bolívar worth reading was published in 1948, and revised in 1969.

If there would be one blemish on this publication, it would be the size of the book; just 304 pages of text, with another 45 pages for notations, bibliography, and index. When one considers the breath of the hero's accomplishments, the many people that came in and out of his life and the number of events that took place and the significance of their outcome, this publication could easily have been better served with an additional 100 more pages of text, to make the secondary characters come really alive. For the many who are not familiar with Bolívar, these secondary individuals end up as props, rather than participants, and at times, the readers may be hard pressed to realize when someone entered the narrative, or left it.

No one should expect this publication to be the definitive biography on Bolívar, yet to Lynch's credit, he has managed to include as much information as possible on the protagonist—Bolívar is little known in the

United States, and Lynch's book offers a very good introduction to modern readers.

Simón Bolívar: A Life

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### **Brinn Colenda says**

I read this book after living in Bolivia and writing my first novel, The Cochabamba Conspiracy, which takes place in and around Cochabamba, Bolivia, and as background for my next novel in which Bolivar himself is a central character.

This is a biography written by a historian and published by the Yale University Press. Lynch does his best to present the material in a readable fashion, as opposed to dry fact after fact that some historians insist on doing. There is an extensive bibliography which will aid the serious reader.

Bolivar was, without a doubt, a powerful force and interesting man. His leadership and personality were needed to break the simply awful Spanish rule of South America. It is amazing to this American that it took so long for South Americans to recognize the need for revolution, probably because Latin America was so huge and so diverse-- but do it they did. The long struggle for independence and Bolivar's outstanding leadership are well documented, along with his problems, mistakes and flaws.

In the last pages of the book, Lynch extrapolates Bolivar's legacy as it developed and changed after his early death.

Basically, this is a well-researched and readable history book.

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### **Laurel says**

I finally changed this to "read" because although I only made it through about half the book, it has been passed along and likely I'll never get it back. Bolivar is incredibly interesting, and if you are a history buff (especially SA history) this book will be great for you. I like history, but this book was really dense with extrordinary detail that I found tedious. Great book, just not my cup of tea.

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### **Luis says**

Brutal, creo que cada persona que haya nacido en Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú y Bolivia debería leerlo y entenderlo, de esa manera tal vez se entiendan a sí mismos. John Lynch es un maestro.

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## Thom says

I learned quite a bit.

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## Clara says

Este es un libro que todo el que haya nacido o crecido en algún país bolivariano debe leer en algún momento. Altamente recomendado para quienes tengan un interés por un personaje que más allá de sus virtudes y defectos cambió el mundo. Hay un antes y después de Simón Bolívar para bien y para mal, como suele ser el caso de las gestas y la vida de los grandes hombres.

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## Trisha says

Took me forever to finish this biography, but I enjoyed learning about Simon Bolivar. I don't think I learned anything about Latin America when I was younger. Lynch did a great job of researching and writing about his life and the war to the death.

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## Jim says

That he is so little known in North America obscures the fact that Simon Bolivar was like all our Founding Fathers rolled into one -- plus a winning general, which none of the Founding Fathers ever were. And instead of liberating just one country, he liberated five: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. And when he had served his role as revolutionary and liberator, he turned to nation-building. It was there he finally failed.

John Lynch's biography, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* is a book of alternating triumph and tragedy. Bolivar tried to do in one lifetime what was given to few men -- not even to Napoleon. It was made even more frustrating by the strange stew of races, climates, and topography that is the northwest of the South American continent. Toward the end of his life (dead at the age of 47 from tuberculosis), Bolivar wrote:

You know that I have ruled for twenty years, and from these I have derived only a few certainties: (1) America is ungovernable, for us; (2) Those who serve a revolution plough the sea; (3) the only thing one can do in America is to emigrate; (4) This country will fall inevitably into the hands of the unbridled masses and then pass almost imperceptibly into the hands of petty tyrants, of all colours and races; (5) Once we have been devoured by every crime and extinguished by utter ferocity, the Europeans will not even regard us as worth conquering; (6) If it were possible for any part of the world to revert to primitive chaos, it would be America in her final hour.

And yet, the countries of South America are emerging from almost two centuries of rule by caudillos and incompetents and are hopeful once more. The peoples of South America now begin to appreciate what

Bolivar tried to do.

John Lynch's biography is excellent. My only complaint is that it could have used better maps to illustrate the tens of thousands of miles traveled by the indefatigable Bolivar over mountains, across plains, and through jungles to achieve his ends.

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### **Kat says**

How did I not know any of this before?

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### **Matt says**

Like many North Americans, I knew nothing of Bolivar other than Hugo Chavez likes to invoke the Liberator's memory to give him cover. Long story short, he liberated modern-day Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia from Spanish rule between 1810-1826. He spent 1826-1830 trying to govern, and got run out of each, accused of being a tyrant. He died weeks/months later of TB at the age of 47, unsure that it was all worth it. Bolivar was a fascinating character who was a revolutionary as far as Spain was concerned, but a reformist in South American affairs. Based on Lynch's assessment, I don't think the Liberator would approve of Chavez's populism or antagonism toward economic liberty - neither was part of his revolution. Waging a so-called revolution against fellow Americans was antithetical to Bolivar's movement. Finally, General Sucre, Bolivar's most trusted general, emerged as an incredibly admirable historical figure, and I was genuinely sad to learn of his murder 180 years ago.

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### **Olethros says**

-Cuidado con lo que se desea porque se puede llegar a conseguir.-

Género. Biografía.

Lo que nos cuenta. Concienzudo y académico repaso (no exento de flemática ironía en algunos momentos) a la figura de Simón Bolívar, desde su infancia en un entorno acomodado y próximo a la administración colonial hasta su resignado final, pasando por la visita a Europa que tanto marcó su personalidad pública y sus anhelos políticos, su camino hacia la revolución en Latinoamérica y la revolución misma.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

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### **David says**

History deep, thorough, and well written, with Bolívar shown as a brilliant charismatic creole, and a 7th generation Venezuelan (a country named after Venice, Italy!). Not easy going early since Lynch delves

deeply into political theory, economic conditions, Spanish policies, slavery, creole society, and major political changing times. It's a rich broth of history, a singular scholarly achievement.

The years 1810 to 1830 were dramatic, and Bolívar moved from country to country creating liberal, democratic, constitutional countries with no longer slavery. Yet by the end of that period "He took the revolution so far ahead of its base that he put it beyond his own control and it became impossible to preserve the model of government he had designed." He had at times poor judgment and yet he was outstanding in his long efforts at freedom from the ancient Spanish rule for Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. A unique and justly famous 'Liberator'. Local regional warlords emerged in Venezuela and southern Colombia, and highland Peru. General Sucre, Bolívar's most trusted general, emerged as an incredibly admirable historical figure, sadly murdered shortly before Bolívar died. General Santander was the conservative man of law, a major thorn in the side of Bolívar - outlasting him to become president of Colombia. Nationalism emerged with many elements remaining of the monarchical Spanish culture.

Publisher's blog:- "This biography draws on extensive research on the man and his era to tell Bolívar's story, to understand his life in the context of his own society and times, and to explore his remarkable and enduring legacy. The book illuminates the inner world of Bolívar, the dynamics of his leadership, his power to command, and his modes of ruling the diverse peoples of Spanish America. The key to his greatness, Lynch concludes, was supreme will power and an ability to inspire people to follow him beyond their immediate interests, in some cases through years of unrelenting struggle. Encompassing Bolívar's entire life and his many accomplishments, this is the definitive account of a towering figure in the history of the Western hemisphere."

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