

# SÍMON BOLÍVAR BY REBECCA HINSON

(HISTORY/NONFICTION)

## Questions for *Símon Bolívar* by Rebecca Hinson

### LEVEL 1: What does it say?

#### General Understanding

- Quote accurately from the text to describe the contributions Símon Bolívar made to South America.

#### Key Details

- Identify causes of the failure of the first Venezuelan Republic as described in the text.
- What led up to Bolívar's vow to break the chains of Spanish oppression?
- What did Símon Bolívar do differently which made the third Venezuelan Republic more successful than the first and the second?
- How did the rise and fall of Napoleon impact Bolívar's revolution in South America?

### LEVEL 2: How does it work?

#### Vocabulary

- Determine the meaning of province, territories, bondage, Creole, elite, militia, tuberculosis, succumbed, guardianship, abdication, Captaincy General, oppress, provincial, banish, pardos, royalist, clergy, civilian, patriot, execute, confiscate, engagement, cavalry, infantry, pursuit, maneuver, about-turn, casualties, savannah, torrential, flanks, Constitution, judiciary, battalion, liberator, invincible.

#### Structure

- Both *Símon Bolívar* and *Liberty* explain revolutions of American territories against European monarchies. Compare and contrast the information presented in the two texts.

#### Author's Craft

- Analyze *Símon Bolívar* and the following excerpts, noting important similarities and differences in the points of view they represent.

## Símon Bolívar A Life

But his prime inspiration seems to have been an innate sense of justice. He regarded it as 'madness that a revolution for liberty should try to maintain slavery.' Yet his attempts to obtain legislation enforcing the absolute abolition of slavery throughout Colombia were not successful. He liberated his own slaves, first on condition of military service in 1814, when about fifteen accepted, then unconditionally in 1821 when over a hundred profited. Few haciendas followed his example.

The Bolivian Constitution declared the slaves free, and although in Bolivia itself the slave owners contrived to evade his intention, his commitment to absolute abolition was uncompromising. Slavery, he declared, was the negation of all law, a violation of human dignity and of the sacred doctrine of equality, and an outrage to reason as well as to justice.

Correct disparity imposed by nature and inheritance, making men equal before the law and constitution. Men are born with equal rights to share the benefits of society. Political and social equality, by education and other opportunities an individual may gain the equality denied by nature.

### The Liberator

Humboldt put science at the service of the same ideal, and he wrote: "In affirming the oneness of the human race, we are also declaring our opposition to the repugnant concept of superior and inferior races. All are equally destined for freedom."

Símon Bolívar said, "It is a political maxim drawn from history that any free government that commits the absurdity of maintaining slavery is punished by rebellion and in some cases by extermination, as in Haiti."

## LEVEL 3: What does it mean?

### Author's Purpose

- What evidence supports the author's assertion (below)?  
"It took a man of great military might and political vision to lead Spanish territories from the shadow of bondage to the light of independence as Gran Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. That man was Símon Bolívar."

### Intertextual Connections

- Bolívar initially advocated for a life presidency which was very unpopular. Years later he regretted it. Draw on information from the following texts to explain why he wanted it and then later changed his mind.

Símon Bolívar A Life

The starting point was the multiracial character of society. Speaking of Venezuela, he observed: 'The diversity of social origin will require an infinitely firm hand and great tactfulness in order to manage this heterogeneous society, whose complex mechanism is easily impaired, separated, and disintegrated by the slightest controversy.'

The statesman who struggled to shore up the revolution's defences was finally left with the task of state building in a society deeply divided by region, race, and ideology.

Bolívar's executive, though elected, was powerful and centralized, virtually a king with the name of president. Again he looked to the British model, a strong executive at the head of government and the armed forces, but accountable to parliament, which had legislative functions and financial control.

Bolívar's views on these matters were well known – strong central government was the only way to secure independence and the only way to constrain the social anarchy which independence released.

His lifelong search for a balance between tyranny and anarchy now moved unerringly towards authority. He told the British consul in Lima 'that his heart always beats in favour of liberty, but that his head leans towards aristocracy . . .if the principles of liberty are too rapidly introduced anarchy and the destruction of the white inhabitants will be the inevitable consequences.'

The president was appointed by the legislature for life and had the right to appoint his successor . . . The president appointed the vice-president, who held the office of prime minister and would succeed the president in office. Thus 'elections would be avoided, which are the greatest scourge of republics and produce only anarchy'. This was the measure of his disillusion seven years after 1819 when at Angostura, he had declared; 'The continuation of authority in the same individual has frequently meant the end of democratic government. Repeated elections are essential in proper systems of government.'

The Bolivarian model of government, designed around life presidency, excluded too many interests from political life and decisions to gain wide acceptance.

## LEVEL 4: What does it inspire you to do?

### Opinion with Evidence or Argument

- In *Simón Bolívar A Life*, John Lynch says, "Leadership is a variable concept and makes different demands in different ages. But one constant is the ability to inspire people, to excite the mind and stir the heart, and to make everything seem possible. . . People followed, if not out of conviction then from faith in Bolívar, inspired by what O'Leary called 'the magic of his prestige'. Integrate information to write or speak knowledgeably about another great leader living today.

## **Sources**

John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar A Life*

Simón Bolívar (translated by Frederick H. Fornoff), *El Libertador*

Augusto Mijares (translated by John Fisher), *The Liberator*

Daniel Florence O'Leary, *Bolívar and the War of Independence*