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Bolívar: Man and Work

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Bolívar: Man and Work

Like George Washington, Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) was a member of the slave-owning colonial aristocracy of his country. He came from a rich and powerful family, with investments in agriculture, ranching and sugar mills. Along with many other talented creoles (that is, American-born colonists) throughout the Western hemisphere, he resented the ceilings and limitations that European government from overseas placed on advancement by those who were not themselves European.

Profoundly influenced by the ideas of the French Enlightenment, Bolívar was a rare instance of the intellectual who was also a man of action. He was a firm believer in legal equality for all men, regardless of class or color. He was opposed to slavery and freed his own slaves in 1821. He saw that the freedom of America from Spanish control required the complete conquest of the royalists, lest a base remain on the continent from which a counterrevolution could be launched.

Without question the greatest figure in the revolutions for independence in Spanish America, both in eloquence and in military leadership, he died in disillusionment with the results of his heroic efforts. Everywhere in America he saw chaos and political instability. Few of his plans for social, economic, and political reform were realized. Only a month before he died he wrote to a friend: "America is ungovernable. Those who serve the revolution plow the sea."

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