

Venezuela's New Bolivar Fuerte Notes



Brian Zimmer & Miguel Chirinos

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The stories behind a colorful new South American currency

by Brian Zimmer, with biographies by Miguel Chirinos

The following article seeks to provide background to the new Venezuelan bolívar fuerte banknotes which entered into circulation January 1, 2008. It examines Venezuela and its new paper currency with an eye towards presenting a brief historical overview of the social, political, and cultural context in which the new notes appear, and concludes with a general description of the notes themselves.

Background

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (formerly the Republic of Venezuela) is the aboriginal land of the Carib and Arawak Amerindians. Sometimes described as a geographical microcosm of South America, it is the sixth largest country in the region, ranging over 900,000 square kilometres (559,234 square miles). Bordering Colombia to the west, Brazil to the south, Guyana to the east, and the Caribbean Sea to the north, Venezuela is dramatically diverse, comprising Amazonian rain forest, grassy plains known as *llanos*, coastal beaches, and desert. It boasts Angel Falls, the world's highest waterfall in the southeast, and *Lago de Maracaibo* in the Maracaibo lowlands, the largest lake in all of Latin America. Vast reserves of oil beneath its surface make it a key producer and exporter of oil to the world—its largest customer: the United States of America. Lying close to the equator, it experiences little climatic variation with two principal seasons: wet and dry. The average temperature is 27°C (80°F).

Discovered in 1498 by Christopher Columbus on his third voyage to the New World, the country was explored the following year by Alonso de Ojeda and Amerigo Vespucci, who named it *Venezuela* (Little Venice), alluding to native habitations they encountered built on stilts in lakes.

Spanish settlements made their appearance by the mid-1500s, but beyond Venezuela's strategic coastal position, Spain found little economic use for the country during the first two centuries of occupation. By the late 16th century, cocoa had become the chief foreign economic product, centralized around the city of Caracas. In 1777, Spain designated the city a seat of Captaincy General, later upgrading its status to *Audiencia de Venezuela* with official judicial and administrative authority.

A key player in the Latin American independence movement of the early 19th century, the colony of Venezuela rebelled against Spain in 1810 under leadership of Francisco de Miranda. The rebellion was aborted due to rivalries surrounding Miranda; the interruption of a devastating earthquake that levelled Caracas and several other cities on March 26, 1812; and the arrest, imprisonment, and death of Miranda in a Spanish jail.

The rebellion was resumed and independence won under Simón Bolívar Palacios, who marched in triumph into Caracas in June 1821. Venezuela combined with what is today Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador to form *República de Gran Colombia* (Republic of Greater Colombia), but seceded in 1830 to form its own sovereign state.

The death of Bolívar in December 1830 signalled the beginning of a century of *caudillismo* rule, characterized by an authoritarian strongman and his circle of cohorts. The first such authority was national hero, General Juan Aguerrevere Páez, second only to Bolívar himself in popularity. Twice president, Páez's rule was marred by factionalism among the elite when

coffee prices plummeted in the 1840s. Power struggles among local caudillos in 1858 and 1863 caused the Federal Wars which were eventually quelled; the government was restored under Antonio Guzmán Blanco, whose rule lasted 18 years.

Various military dictatorships governed Venezuela promoting the oil industry and limited social reforms until the late 1950s. Large reserves of oil had been discovered in the first half of the 20th century in the Maracaibo Basin during the regime of General Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-35), transforming the previously agrarian economy into one of the world's major oil producers. As a result, Venezuela became one of the most prosperous nations in all of Latin America.

A brief experiment in democracy, known as the *trienio*, lasted from 1945 until 1948 when the country's first democratically elected president, Rómulo Gallegos Freire, was overthrown in a military coup by General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. In 1958, Jiménez himself was ousted by a political coalition, effectively ending caudillismo and military rule, replacing it with civilian constitutional rule and a new constitution adopted in 1961 during the second term of President Rómulo Betancourt, the first Venezuelan president to serve a full term.

Rómulo Betancourt was succeeded in 1964 by Raúl Leonie, followed by the administration of Rafael Caldera Rodríguez in 1969. Relative stability continued and increased under Caldera Rodríguez. However, under his successor, Carlos Andrés Pérez of *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action Party), elected to office in 1974, plummeting oil prices ushered in a period of economic stress and social turmoil from the start of Pérez's first term.

The decade spanning 1979-1989 saw the Venezuelan economy grind to a near halt, the same period marked by the Pérez administration becoming embroiled in charges of corruption. When Pérez attempted to enact an austerity program in 1989, the Caracazo Riots broke out in which more than 200 people died. In February 1992, an attempted coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías, though unsuccessful, made a popular hero of Chávez. The Venezuelan people, dissatisfied with the current government, forced President Rafael Caldera, who had succeeded Carlos Andrés Pérez upon his impeachment by Congress in 1990, to pardon the jailed Chávez in 1994.

Hugo Chávez

The December 1998 landslide victory of Hugo Chávez to the office of president saw the rise to power of the left in Venezuela. Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement party (*Movimiento Quinta República–MVR*) joined forces with Homeland for All (*Patria Para Todos–PPT*) and Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo–MAS*) to form the Patriotic Pole (*Polo Patriótico–PP*), a coalition party answering to the radical demand for change by a majority of Venezuelans fatigued by years of corruption and incompetence under candidates drawn from the country's two traditional political parties.

Acting on the promise of change, the new government undertook to rewrite the 1961 constitution by an elected Constituent Assembly, voters approving the new document in April 1999 and ratifying it the following December.

In 2001, the year after Hugo Chávez won re-election to the office of president for another six years, again by a majority of the

vote, the middle-class, along with certain members of the military, unions, conservative business organizations, and Venezuelan Petroleum, reacted to what they considered the president's cronyism and failure to produce economic growth and security by staging strikes in 2002 and 2003. In March 2002, the military briefly deposed Chávez but he was restored to power by the army a mere two days later. A national referendum to unseat the president failed on August 15, 2004, a vote judged free and fair by outside observers.

The Bolívar Fuerte

Per the March 7, 2007 announcement by the Central Bank, on January 1, 2008, under the directive of President Hugo Chávez, Venezuela converted its currency from the bolívar to what Chávez has optimistically renamed the *bolívar fuerte venezolano*, or strong bolívar (ISO 4217 code: VEF). One bolívar fuerte is equivalent to 1,000 bolívares and continues to exchange at the unchanged rate of VEF2.15 per USD1 at the time of this writing, though *The Banknote Update* reports "it is rumored that Venezuela will adjust the rate to better reflect the free market rate, which could cut these values roughly in half." The stated rate therefore, is best viewed as tentative at this time. The six new notes denominated 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 bolívares fuerte (BsF) are equivalent to 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, and 100,000 bolívares (Bs), respectively.

The bolívar began its official use as the Venezuelan currency in the form of coinage in 1879, replacing the *venezolano* (1 *venezolano* = 5 bolívares). The first banknotes were issued by the *Central Banco de Venezuela* in 1940. By 1945, 10-, 20-, 50-, 100-, and 500-bolívares notes were in circulation. The short-lived 5-bolívares note (1966-74) was soon replaced by a coin. As inflation increased over the years, higher denominations with their added zeros were introduced. All previous banknotes of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, and 10,000 bolívares remain in circulation along with the newer emissions. Originally pegged at par with the French franc, since 1934 the bolívar has been pegged to the US dollar and officially pegged at the current rate since March 2005.

When Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999, the oil-driven Venezuelan economy underwent radical change due to socialist reform and institutional restructuring introduced by the Chávez government. Still an immensely popular leader with much of the population—particularly the poor—the once seemingly invincible leader was handed his first major defeat in November 2007 when the country voted down a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the president to stand for re-election indefinitely.

Hard-hit by rising inflation in 2007, the Venezuelan currency has weakened 74% since 1999 when Chávez took office. Due to a declining bolívar on the black-market pushing up prices of imported goods, Venezuelans, concerned by government incursion into the service industries reacted by moving money out of the country. Such reaction resulted in the bolívar being numbered among the world's worst performing currencies in 2007. The government also blamed hoarding for the rise in prices of basic goods like eggs, milk, and sugar, but price controls imposed in 2003 contributed by undermining incentive for investment in the food industry.

Nevertheless, Venezuela continues to experience strong economic growth at an enviable rate of around 10% annually, mostly in the form of oil revenues, while holding US\$30 billion in foreign currency reserves. Unfortunately, the result has been an increase in demand for goods of all kinds without a corresponding increase in national productivity.

If the Chávez government can marry the psychological symbolism of the new currency to a renewed emphasis on

domestic investment and public and private restraint on spending, such a strategy might go some way towards curbing runaway inflation and restoring confidence to frayed economic nerves while continuing to honour the government's goal of providing for the basic needs of the entire population.

Whether Hugo Chávez's championing of the bolívar fuerte is wishful thinking, propaganda, or the beginning of authentic financial reform in the country remains to be seen. Much depends on future policy making and any number of economic adjustments the Venezuelan president and, ultimately, the Venezuelan people are willing to enact and embrace. Renaming of currency and deletion of superfluous digits, while perhaps helpful in refocusing the national psyche, will not by themselves suffice to fully address inflation, the fall-out from international corporate withdrawal and issues resulting from introduction of government into previously independent industry and business. As always, strong opinion falls on both sides regarding the possible motives, consequences, and ultimate success or failure of Chávez's initiative.

The New Notes

The new bolívar fuerte notes shown on the following pages are easily distinguished from previous emissions by their bright colours and the vertical orientation of their fronts. For the first time women and indigenous peoples are depicted among the heroes and historical figures on the banknotes. The backs feature various flora and endangered fauna of the country's extraordinarily diverse and vulnerable eco-systems.

Since 1999, Venezuelan banknotes, including the new bolívares fuertes, have been printed under the auspices of *Banco Central de Venezuela* (Central Bank of Venezuela) by the country's new mint and note printing facility, *Casa de la Moneda-Venezuela*, built on lands belonging to La Placera Hacienda in Maracay, Aragua state, construction having been completed in 1998.

The new notes are all dated March 20, 2007 (20 DE MARZO DE 2007). The fronts of the notes possess two signatures, that of the president and first vice-president of the Central Bank of Venezuela (*PRESIDENTE, BCV & PRIMER VICEPRESIDENTE, BCV*) respectively. The backs of the notes display the Venezuelan coat of arms. Incorporating a variety of significant security features, the bolívares fuerte utilize intaglio printing with the denomination in optically variable ink (OVI), watermark portrait, electrotype watermarked denominational numerals, micro-printing, security thread, registration device, raised symbol for the blind, latent image, and special textured and finished banknote paper.

Conclusion

A new emission of banknotes is always an occasion of interest for scholars and collectors. When the new notes are also beautiful, possess portraiture or vignettes suggesting a new sensibility or departure from past emissions, and when an aura of controversy and economic risk surrounds their issuance, such features combine to become an event well nigh irresistible to numismatists everywhere.

Venezuela's new bolívares fuerte notes are just such an event. Aesthetically pleasing, integrating many interesting security features, rich in historical and regional detail, their economic merit open to question—there is something here to stimulate banknote enthusiasts of every stripe.

2 Bolívares Fuerte

The predominately blue and orange 2-bolívares fuerte note (US\$0.95) depicts a young Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816) in



military jacket on the front. The back depicts in the foreground two Boto river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*), endemic to the Amazon and Orinoco rivers. The sand dunes of the *Parque Nacional Médanos de Coro* on the Isthmus of Médanos with Gusano flor blossoms are featured in the background. The image of a dolphin serves as a registration device, as do all the animals on the backs of the new notes.

In addition to the new 2-bolívares fuerte note, Francisco de Miranda's portrait has previously appeared on the 5-bolívares note (P50 and P70) with his friend Bolívar, and alone on the 5,000-bolívares note (P91).

Miranda was born in Caracas on March 28, 1750, the son of a Spaniard from the Canary Islands. Fairly early in life he entered the Spanish army and went to Madrid supplied with ample funds and letters of introduction. He bought a captaincy and began to keep a diary, which in time became the nucleus of an immense archive. His military career did not go well. Accused of neglect of duty, he was eventually cleared and was sent to Cuba, where he again fell out with the authorities.

In 1783, he left the Spanish army and fled to the United States. Henceforth, Miranda was in open rebellion against the Spanish crown. Spurred by the example of the 13 colonies that had achieved independence from England, he aspired to set up an independent empire in Hispanic America. Among his friends in the United States were such luminaries as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Paine. Constantly hounded by Spanish agents, he visited England, Prussia, Austria, Italy, Turkey, and Russia. Catherine the Great took a liking to him and allowed him to wear the Russian uniform and use a Russian passport.

In 1790, he offered his services to the French army. He fought in several wars during the French Revolution. His name was later inscribed upon the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris, the only Latin American so honored.

In 1810, he met the envoy of revolutionary Simón Bolívar. Bolívar induced Miranda to return to his native country, and after 40 years of absence, the aging conspirator again set foot in his homeland. When Venezuela formally declared independence on July 5, 1811, Miranda assumed dictatorial powers.

Miranda created the Venezuelan flag; later Colombia and Ecuador adopted the same colors to symbolize emancipation from Spain. Also, it was Miranda who suggested that the Venezuelan congress issue banknotes. In 1811, notes denominated 1, 2, 4, 8, and 16 pesos were put into circulation, but only for one year.

Even so, Venezuela became the first country in Spanish America to issue notes.

After a year of war with the Spanish, Miranda concluded an armistice with the counterrevolutionary Monteverde. The victorious Monteverde sent him to Spain, where he was thrown into prison, eventually dying in 1816 in the fortress of the Four Towers, Cadiz.

As a result of Miranda's contributions to the American Revolution, a park in Pensacola, Florida, a statue in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a commuter bus in Chicago, Illinois, were dedicated in tribute to this notable patriot who eventually took part in revolutions on three continents.

5 Bolívares Fuerte

The 5-bolívares fuerte note (US\$2.35) is light orange and tan, the front showing former slave turned revolutionary fighter, Pedro Camejo (1790-1821). Camejo was mortally wounded in the famous Battle at Carabobo. He distinguished himself for integrity with Simón Bolívar and extraordinary valor under General José Antonio Páez. The back of the note illustrates two giant armadillos (*Priodontes maximus*), the largest of its species, currently listed as threatened with extinction by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The animals forage against a backdrop of palm trees in Los Llanos.

Pedro Camejo's portrait on the new 5-bolívares fuerte note (2007) was inspired by the bust—made by the sculptor Antonio Rodríguez—which is at Carabobo Square in Caracas, Venezuela.

Pedro Camejo was born in San Juan de Payara in 1790. He was a slave of Vicente Alonzo on a ranch in Apure state. At the beginning of the War of Independence, he was part of the royalist army, then joined the patriot army in 1816, forming ranks with General Páez.

In 1818, when Simón Bolívar arrived at San Juan de Payara, he met Camejo for the first time. Camejo was better known as *Negro Primero* (First Black), a nickname inspired by his bravery and skill in handling the spear and from the fact that he was always in the first line of attack on the battlefield. Camejo's courage and warrior strength, along with his references given by General Páez, aroused the interest of "El Libertador." Bolívar learned that Camejo had initially joined the army for want of pay; but then he realized that the fight had higher purposes.

Camejo was one of the 150 lancers who participated in the



Battle of the Queseras del Medio (1819) and on that occasion, he received the Order of the Liberators of Venezuela and reached the rank of lieutenant. On June 24, 1821, in the Battle of Carabobo, Camejo was a member of a cavalry regiment of the first division led by his old friend, General Páez. Mortally wounded in the middle of the battle, Camejo reportedly said to Páez, "My general, I come to tell you goodbye, because I am dying."

10 Bolívares Fuerte

A portrait of Guaicaipuro (c. 1530-1568) graces the front of the 10-bolívars fuerte note (US\$4.65). *Cacique* (chief) of the Tecques and Caracas tribes, Guaicaipuro was a gifted leader and organizer of the aboriginal peoples against the Spanish invaders during the mid to late 16th century. Predominately dark orange and brown, the back shows the Ucaima Falls in the background and the exotic-looking American harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) in the foreground. With talons longer than the claws of a grizzly bear, the harpy eagle is the largest eagle in all of the Americas with an average wingspan of 200 cm (6' 7"). Threatened by logging and hunting, the bird has been given "near endangered" status by the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Like other chiefs in Latin America, Guaicaipuro was both admired and obeyed. His opinion was the law of the region. He administrated justice. Also, he had physical courage and the strength of character of a natural leader. He formed a powerful coalition of different tribes, which he led against the Spanish conquest of Venezuelan territory. Also, his allies in the north central valleys attacked the Spanish gold mines and settlements and forced them to leave. Baruta, his son, became a cacique of one of the tribes.

After these successes Guaicaipuro became the central figure in the uprising of all the natives tribes in the vicinity of the Caracas valley, and managed to unite all the tribes under his command. In 1562, they defeated an expeditionary force led by Luis Narvaez. Due to the fierce attacks, the Spanish retreated from the area for several years.



In January 1567, Diego de Losada traveled to Caracas with an experienced army. On July 25, 1567, Losada founded Santiago de León de Caracas. At the beginning of 1569, Losada and his army came to Mariara and later to *Valle del Miedo* (Valley Fear), Guaicaipuro's dominion. Spanish forces beat the Indians in a cruel battle. Losada appointed Francisco Infante to capture Guaicaipuro, but he was killed during the battle.



Guaicaipuro's remains have never been found. However they were moved symbolically to the National Pantheon on December 8, 2001. Every year on October 12, Venezuelans celebrate *Día de la Raza* (Discovery Day), which was recently renamed the Day of the Indigenous Resistance in tribute to the 33 indigenous tribes that still remain in Venezuela, representing 7% of the total population.

20 Bolívares Fuerte

A true mother of the movement for Venezuelan Independence, Luisa Cáceres de Arismendi (1799-1866) is featured on the front of the pink and aqua 20-bolívars fuerte note (US\$9.30). Born into a family of freedom fighters, Cáceres met and married fellow revolutionary, Juan Bautista Arismendi. Detained by Spanish authorities in 1815, she remained defiant under interrogation and torture. She returned to Venezuela in 1818, loyal to her ideals and dreams for the region.



The back of the notes depict two hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), mysterious large sea reptiles about which much still remains unknown, today designated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) as "highly endangered."

The portrait of Luisa Cáceres de Arismendi that appears on the new 20-bolívars fuerte note was inspired by a Emilio J. Mauri painting. Luisa Caceres was born in Caracas on September 25, 1799. Her father José Domingo Cáceres was a notable historian and grammarian. On July 7, 1814, Luisa Caceres joined some twenty thousand Caracans with Simón Bolívar at their head, to begin their migration to Isla Margarita where she married Juan Bautista Arismendi on December 4, 1814.

In 1815, Luisa Caceres was held prisoner by Spanish General Morillo because she refused to reveal her husband's whereabouts. Arismendi wrote to Morillo: "If I don't have a homeland, what do I need a wife for?" His pregnant wife was carried to Santa Rosa fortress in La Asunción. While being held in the dungeon, the 16-year-old Caceres delivered a stillborn daughter.

A few months later, Caceres was sent to La Guaira and then transferred to Caracas where she stayed for several weeks in the convent of the Immaculate Conception. In 1816, Caceres was sent to Spain with other political prisoners. During the trip, the ship was attacked by Americans and the prisoners were disembarked on the Azores Islands.

In 1817, Caceres arrived in Cadiz. When Spanish authorities offered her freedom if she signed a document renouncing her

ideas of independence, she responded, "I do not resign to my duties." With the valuable intervention of an English friend and Francisco Carabaño, she managed to escape to the United States.

Caceres arrived in Philadelphia in May 1818. After receiving the news of her victorious husband General Arismendi, she returned to Venezuela and was received with a tribute befitting a living symbol of faith.

Luisa Caceres de Arismendi died in Caracas in 1866. Her remains are in the National Pantheon to perpetuate her exemplary name as a founder of the mother country.

50 Bolívares Fuerte

The portrait on the green and yellow 50-bolívars fuerte note (US\$23.30) is of Simón Rodríguez (c. 1769-1854), scholar, educator, world-traveller, and mentor to Simón Bolívar, who called him "the Socrates of Colombia." A devotee of Rousseau, Rodríguez exerted enormous influence and energy throughout South America, setting up schools, teaching, and through his various writings.

Against a backdrop of Laguna del Santo Cristo, the back of the note depicts the gentle spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatos*), the last surviving species of native bear in all of South America. An arboreal animal known for its extraordinary climbing ability, the spectacled bear is threatened by ongoing devastation to its forest habitat.

The portrait of Simón Rodríguez previously appeared on 20,000-bolívars notes (P82 and P93), and now appears on the new 50-bolívars fuerte.

Simón Rodríguez was born in Caracas in 1769. His parents were Don Cayetano Carreño and Rosalía Rodríguez. He adopted his mother's last name after a discussion with his elder brother, Cayetano.



Rodríguez was an educator and among his pupils was Simón Bolívar. Rodríguez began his lessons about the time that Bolívar's mother died, and Bolívar later acknowledged the power of the enlightenment ideas Rodríguez conveyed, "You have molded my heart for liberty, justice, greatness, and beauty. I have followed the path you traced for me."

In 1797, Rodríguez was working as a typesetter in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1801, he went to Europe because he was a devotee of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and French Revolution ideologies. In the spring of 1804, Bolívar reacquainted with Rodríguez, who was living in



Paris. There, Bolívar resumed his studies with his boyhood mentor, who introduced him to the philosophy of several rationalist thinkers, as well the more recent teachings of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and especially Rousseau, who had a profound impact on Bolívar's evolving political philosophy.

In 1805, Bolívar went to Vienna to visit his old tutor, Rodríguez, and the two set out on a walking trip to Rome. It is said that while in Rome, Bolívar took Rodríguez to the top of Mount Sacro, where he swore to God that he would never rest until his homeland was independent.

Later, Rodríguez returned to South America. In Bolivia and Chile, he founded technical schools to teach trades to young people who lacked money. In Ecuador, he was a botanical and agricultural professor. Rodríguez had an adventurer's spirit and he used to say, "I don't want to seem like the trees that take root in a single place; but like the wind, the water, the sun, all those things that march incessantly."

In 1828, he wrote his first book, *Extracto Sucinto sobre la Educación Republicana* (Brief Summary about Republican Education). In 1830, he published another book, *El Libertador del Mediodía de America* (The Liberator at Midday of America), followed by *Sociedades Americanas* (American Societies) in 1842.

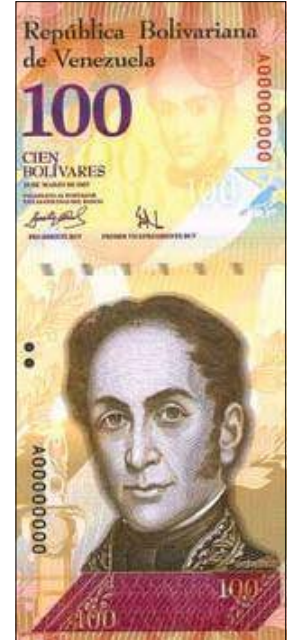
Simón Rodríguez died in Amatope, Perú on February 28, 1854.

100 Bolívares Fuertes

"El Libertador," Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), dressed in military uniform, gazes out from the front of the 100-bolívars fuerte note (US\$46.55), a rust and green note with two black-hooded red siskins (*Carduelis cucullata*) featured on the back. A beautiful finch distinguished for its unique colouring and the male's melodious song, the red siskin is considered an endangered species due to extensive capture for the cage-bird trade.

Venezuela adopted the "Silver Bolívar" as its basic unit of currency on March 31, 1879, and Simon Bolivar's portrait has appeared on numerous denominations of banknotes over the years, both in Venezuela and other neighboring countries. The image on the new 100-bolívars fuerte note is based upon a portrait known as *Bolívar Diplomático* (Diplomatic Bolivar), which was painted by Rita Matilde de la Peñuela in 1860.

Simón Bolívar was born into a wealthy Creole family in Caracas, on July 24, 1783. His father, Juan Vicente Bolívar, was rich and owned a great deal of land, but died while Simón was only a child. His mother, Maria de la Concepción Palacios, also



died when he was a boy. As such, he was raised by others and educated in Europe.

At the end of 1806, Bolívar went to the United States, disembarking in Boston. Then he traveled to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Mount Vernon, observing the nation with its brand-new constitution. From Charleston, South Carolina, he took a trading ship to La Guaira in the summer of 1807.

Revered by many South Americans as “El Libertador” and called “the George Washington of South America,” Bolívar led a successful 14-year revolution to end Spain’s colonial rule of the area that comprises Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

During this conflict, he earned a reputation as a resolute commander and exceptional military tactician, but perhaps his most enduring contribution to the South American independence movement was his political vision for the colonies he liberated. This vision consisted of an unusual combination of authoritarianism and republicanism.

Ultimately, Bolívar’s life-long ambition was to replace the Spanish colonial system in Latin America with a closely allied confederation of republics (also known as *Gran Colombia*) that shared common political and economic goals.

On December 17, 1830, Bolívar died of tuberculosis near the town of Santa Marta, Colombia. His remains were carried to Venezuela in 1842.

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