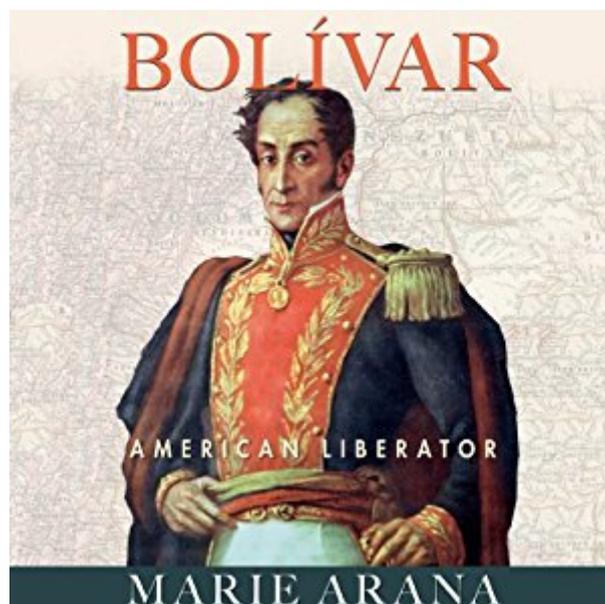


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Bolivar: American Liberator



Synopsis

It is astonishing that Simón Bolívar, the great Liberator of South America, is not better known in the United States. He freed six countries from Spanish rule, traveled more than 75,000 miles on horseback to do so, and became the greatest figure in Latin American history. His life is epic, heroic, straight out of Hollywood: he fought battle after battle in punishing terrain, forged uncertain coalitions of competing forces and races, lost his beautiful wife soon after they married and never remarried (although he did have a succession of mistresses, including one who held up the revolution and another who saved his life), and he died relatively young, uncertain whether his achievements would endure. Drawing on a wealth of primary documents, novelist and journalist Marie Arana brilliantly captures early 19th-century South America and the explosive tensions that helped revolutionize Bolívar. In 1813 he launched a campaign for the independence of Colombia and Venezuela, commencing a dazzling career that would take him across the rugged terrain of South America, from jungles to the Andes mountains. From his battlefield victories to his ill-fated marriage and legendary love affairs, Bolívar emerges as a man of many facets: fearless general, brilliant strategist, consummate diplomat, passionate abolitionist, gifted writer, and flawed politician. A major work of history, Bolívar colorfully portrays a dramatic life even as it explains the rivalries and complications that bedeviled Bolívar's tragic last days. It is also a stirring declaration of what it means to be a South American.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Simón Bolívar liberated six South American countries from Spanish rule. An amazing achievement. Marie Arana has accomplished no less an amazing achievement in her mighty tome *Bolívar: American Liberator* (Simon & Schuster, 2013). Arana's book is impressive, both in its girth (464 pages of text plus over 100 pages of notes) and the depth of research conducted into Bolívar's life. Born into a wealthy family in 1783 Caracas in the Venezuelan portion of the Spanish empire, Simón Bolívar hardly seemed destined to be a revolutionary. A slight 5'6" in height and only 130 lbs, he nevertheless was a "spirited youth." He grew up in luxury in a country in which the Spanish crown had imposed strict divisions between the classes and races. A trip to Europe as he came of age exposed him to even greater privilege, but also inspired him to pledge that he would liberate his homeland. Arana captures this coming of age in a story that reads like a novel. After two revolutions fail to take hold, Bolívar finally is able to lead the creation of a third republic that begins a constant battle that would consume him for the rest of his life. Arana deftly intertwines the events of the United States (War of 1812) and Europe (Napoleon, Spanish wars) with the major battles and exploits of Bolívar and other key players both within and without of his control. In what we now might call "mission creep," the revolution to rid Venezuela from the Spanish spreads across greater Granada and beyond to encompass what now includes Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and the newly created Bolivia (named after Bolívar).

Although there are sixteen cities or counties named for Venezuelan-born Simón Bolívar in the United States -- including Bolivar (Jefferson County) West Virginia, next door to Harpers Ferry -- the real Great Liberator -- the man behind the elaborate uniforms he's pictured in -- is not very well known in the United States. Marie Arana of *The Washington Post* remedies that in her masterful, comprehensive and very readable biography. Even so, the military leader/politician's life and philosophy was so complicated that you'll probably come away from Arana's book with more questions than answers. And that's a good thing to take away from an outstanding biography. If there's truth in Harry Truman's famous statement that if you want a friend in Washington, DC get a dog, advice given to Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios Ponte y Blanco (24 July 1783 - 17 December 1830) would be to get dogs in the capitals of all six of the countries he's credited with liberating: Caracas, Venezuela; Bogota, Colombia; Panama City, Panama (then part of Colombia); Quito, Ecuador; Lima, Peru (together with Argentina's Don José de San Martín), and La Paz, Bolivia. The book's publication was timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of his first effort to throw off the Spanish yoke from Venezuela, the first of six countries he's credited with freeing. In so doing, he traveled more than 75,000 miles on horseback -- gaining

the nickname "Iron Ass" -- and became the greatest figure in Latin American history.

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