

**THE PARADOX OF FREEDOM:  
THOMAS JEFFERSON, SIMÓN BOLÍVAR AND  
SLAVERY IN THE NEW WORLD**

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**Dedicated to Professor Simon Collier**

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
The Era of Planter Revolution in the Americas.....	7
Thomas Jefferson and the Paradox.....	10
Simón Bolívar and the Paradox.....	22
Legacy of the Paradox of Freedom.....	35
Selected Bibliography.....	45

The era of revolution in the Americas that began in 1770 dramatically transformed nations on both sides of the Atlantic and, indeed, throughout the world. As leading figures during these years of upheaval, Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar became the two central authors of a new republican nationalism in the Western Hemisphere by seizing upon liberal ideals of freedom in the rhetoric of their post-revolutionary governments. Each was ultimately successful in overthrowing a colonial power, however, both confronted the serious dilemma that slavery and the legacy of racial inequality presented to the leadership following independence. The American and Latin American Revolutions produced social and political structures where pre-existing issues concerning economic and racial inequality remained unresolved. It was these very same problems that would later send nations throughout North and South America into vicious civil wars over the true meanings of a freedom first proclaimed by Jefferson and Bolívar.

This thesis is a comparative study of slavery in the Americas as interpreted by Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar in their political discourses. An analysis of selected writings reveals striking similarities in their understanding of freedom, particularly the way it related to the principle obstacle of freedom in the Americas – slavery. In their public and private correspondences, Jefferson and Bolívar confronted and struggled with the dilemma that the liberty they secured and declared for all Americans in revolution could not be actualized following independence. In this study, I intend to investigate how the “paradox of freedom”, as the historian Edmund S. Morgan has described it, inherent in their demands for ‘inalienable rights’ and *independencia* influenced their personal views about liberty and slavery. The recognition and acknowledgment of the

contradiction between freedom and slavery in their daily lives, and more importantly the evolution of their thought, set these two monumental historical figures apart from their contemporaries. They each reinterpreted similar philosophies and social concepts in light of their own unique cultural dynamics, reassessed and changed their views with developments abroad, and ultimately chose markedly different approaches to the fundamental problem that slavery posed to their nations.

As the product of colonial plantation society, the paradox was evident in their daily lives, and subsequently manifested in their writing and actions. Although separated by generational and geographic barriers, they were exposed to very similar formative experiences through their studies and travel. They corresponded with some of the same people over the identical problems and each commented on the other and the movements they led, albeit never in direct correspondence. Jefferson and Bolívar had their identity, wealth and political power intimately tied to the plantation complex. Among their many roles, the one that was most central to their views on freedom and slavery was that of planter. In practical and symbolic terms, plantation agriculture defined these men and, in turn, their understanding of the concepts of freedom in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They were united not only in that they fought to overthrow a European colonial empire in the Americas, and were central in the formulation of the new republican governments that subsequently replaced them, but also in their role as planters advocating freedom in a slave society.

The purpose for comparing these two concepts of freedom is to expose the shared perspective that Jefferson and Bolívar held with regards to slavery. They are in numerous ways the symbolic representatives of the distinctive cultural, political and legal

traditions that influenced the development of slavery and related conceptions of freedom. In many respects, they each provided a unique archetype upon which their societies would be recreated after the wars for independence in separate regions of the Americas.<sup>1</sup>

The hemispheric treatment of these issues is not new to the historical literature and there currently exists a large body of scholarship in the comparative studies of slavery.<sup>2</sup> Even a contemporary friend to both Jefferson and Bolívar, Baron Alexander von Humboldt, wrote comparatively of Mexico City and Philadelphia back in the early nineteenth century. In addition, there already exists a considerable amount of secondary literature pertaining independently to both Simón Bolívar and Thomas Jefferson, however I have not seen any scholarship that has placed these two historical figures within a comparative historical context, particularly in regards to the issue of slavery. Nor have I uncovered any comparative study of North and South American political leaders in general that explores how they dealt with central dilemma that faced those in the movements for independence.

This immediately raises the question why? While a considerable amount has been independently written of each, more than could possibly be incorporated into my research, inter-American dialogue on how revolutionary leaders addressed the problems of slavery and freedom has not been fully developed in the existing literature. By treating the research in a hemispheric-wide context, rather than along the traditional divisions between American and Latin American studies, this thesis will provide a new perspective

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<sup>1</sup> Walsh, Philip W. "Representations of Nature in Revolutionary and Post-Colonial American Nations: A Study of the Political Traditions in the Thought of Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Among the more recent contribution are Plantation Societies in the Era of European Expansion. Judy Bieber, Ed. Brookfield, Vermont, USA: Variorum, 1997. Philip D. Curtin's The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990.

from which to analyze the parallel problems of the revolutionary era. The goal is to provide an understanding of how similar notions of freedom were interpreted by planters in two different contexts and how it impacted the cultural and political aspects of post-revolutionary America. Appreciating that the fact that two movements are unique and distinct historical events, the common themes and influence that transformed North and South America from 1770-1830 helped lead to the development of a shared hemispheric conception of exceptionalism, founded in freedom, which shaped a wide range of later policies. If for no other reason, it is thus by virtue of their central importance to the development of this shared conception that Jefferson and Bolívar should be compared. The availability of writings by Jefferson and Bolívar that discuss the paradox in hemisphericism was another reason for their selection. They also performed similar, yet unique and distinctive, roles in the formation and direction of a postrevolutionary government in the Americas. Finally, both remain controversial figures academically and politically. Jefferson and Bolívar remain highly charged figures used by a wide variety of groups for a myriad of purposes. In identifying the similarities between Jefferson and Bolívar, as well as the important differences in the problems they faced, I hope to demonstrate how they both had similar influences and goals but markedly different obstacles and processes in addressing the 'paradox of freedom'.

### **The Era of Planter Revolution in the Americas**

Following centuries of colonial rule, landed creole elites throughout the Western Hemisphere led revolts against the royal authority of mercantilist European empires demanding independence and autonomy. Influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment, former English, Spanish, French and Portuguese colonies sought to create democratic

governments that adapted radically new political and social philosophies to their unique situations. Planters and large landowners were often the key figures in these revolutionary upheavals because of the central role that the plantation played in political, economic, social and cultural aspects of rural eighteenth and nineteenth-century life. These relatively small groups were disproportionately influential in shaping the political institutions, economic structures and social relations of their predominately rural communities. The three main factors that led to this planter dominance were the cash crop (tobacco, cacao, sugar, cotton, etc.) comprising a large proportion of the economy, the planter aristocracy with a solidary style of life and an interest in slave institutions, and empires' letting planters run the government. Thus while regional variation did occur depending upon crop and location, planters solidified their dominance via economic, political and social avenues.

Jefferson and Bolívar entered into an ideological climate that was filled with spirited debate over the individual and his relation to others in a society. In The Americas in the Age of Revolution: 1750-1850, Lester Langley notes that, "In a age when political, economic, and social dynamics profoundly shook transatlantic empires, colonial elites wanted a different relationship with the home country and risked treason and war to achieve it. What they did not anticipate was the changes in their relationship with those who participated in these conflicts."<sup>3</sup> The surprisingly unexpected and fundamentally revolutionary roles that Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar played, as leaders of a planter gentry who were instrumental in overthrowing a colonial system which had placed them at the apex of the economic, social and political pyramid, is of

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<sup>3</sup> Langley, Lester D. The Americas in the Age of Revolution: 1750-1850. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1994. pp. 3.



central importance in their struggle with the “paradox of freedom.” Of equal importance to this transformation was the limitations that Bolívar and Jefferson placed on the very democratic ideals and institutions they helped to establish. While proclaiming the universality of their freedom, both had reservations about extending the civil rights and privileges to all ‘Americans’.

The comparative literature has generally focused more on the economic and social aspects of slavery and plantations rather than the impact that it had on individual figures, yet several works have spoken independently about its influence on Jefferson and Bolívar. In American Slavery, American Freedom (1975), Edmund Morgan chronicles the development of slavery in the Chesapeake and how the existence of slavery enabled the white population to develop a race based, rather than class based, definition of freedom. Morgan terms this the “paradox of freedom” and contends that Virginians had a special appreciation for liberty precisely because they saw what life was like without it on a daily basis. Describing Jefferson as the “slaveholding spokesman for freedom” he insightfully observes that. “The rise of liberty and equality in this country was accompanied by the rise of slavery. That two such contradictory developments were taking place simultaneously over a long period of our history, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, is central to the paradox of American history.” David Brion Davis, in his The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823, also explores how other students of the Enlightenment, many of whom owned slaves despite being earnest opponents to slavery, reconciled the conflicting viewpoints by selectively applying certain “universal” and “inalienable” rights. Philip D. Curtin’s The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex probably best captures the core of this argument:

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The fall of the plantation complex was associated with a broader set of political changes that sometimes go by the name of the “Democratic Revolution” – a phrase that groups together a series of political revolutions around the Atlantic rim...One aspect of special importance for the plantation complex was the attack on slavery. The early-eighteenth-century rights-of-man philosophy was accepted by many of the enlightened, but it had to do with the rights of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie, not those of colonial slaves.

These scholars reach the conclusion that the hypocrisy that is so astoundingly evident to a modern audience was logically justified by eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers on the basis of a deep-seeded racism that pervaded all aspects of slaveholding society.

Economic self-interest, ignorance and acculturation prevented many, though not all, of Jefferson’s contemporaries from accepting the existence of slavery in the face of increasing challenges at home and abroad. J. L. Salcedo-Bastardo further develops the idea that Bolívar not only embodied the spirit of the revolutionary movement but harbored deep anxieties about the inability of his people to completely overcome three centuries of slavery. Although Robert Harvey and Hendrik Willem van Loon present more romantic versions of Bolívar, they too highlight how the limits that slavery imposed on the minds and actions of revolutionary leaders in the Western Hemisphere played a significant part in the failure of initial post-revolutionary governments.

### **Thomas Jefferson and the Paradox**

Thomas Jefferson confronted, articulated and embodied the best aspects as well as the worst contradictions of the American Revolution. As a central political figure in the independence movement and subsequent new state and national governments, Jefferson framed the philosophical foundation of freedom in the United States. Jefferson advocated a radical new form of representative democracy based in the natural rights legal tradition. However, he also believed that these inalienable rights to “life, liberty

and the pursuit of happiness” could not be universally extended, especially to the one-fifth segment of the population that was enslaved. As a planter in the colonial South, he confronted the serious dilemma of slavery on an extremely intimate level throughout his life. As a politician in the young American government, he became increasingly concerned with the tension between the ideals of freedom and the realities of slavery. Winthrop D. Jordan observed that, “Thomas Jefferson, perhaps more than anyone else, was intellectually trapped by American slavery... While his political theory and indeed his entire worldview declared slavery to be wrong, Jefferson’s social views greatly complicated and compromised his thinking about the institution.”<sup>4</sup> The limitations to true liberty that Jefferson and others placed on the very democratic ideals and institutions they helped to establish underscore how pervasive the colonial planter mentality remained among the founders even decades after independence.

The enigmatic character of Thomas Jefferson has intrigued people on all sides of the slavery debate since he first proposed a bill for emancipation in 1769 as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses. “Since Jefferson was not only an eventful and event-making historical figure but a truly encyclopedic mind with a lively curiosity about the science, art and culture of his time,” Sidney Hook concedes. “this gives the lecturer almost carte blanche to take his point of departure from almost any current discipline or fundamental human problem.”<sup>5</sup> This has most clearly been seen by the fact that abolitionist and pro-slavery factions alike seized upon Jeffersonian rhetoric to support their position. The understanding of the concept of freedom by a large slaveholder within a slave society is in and of itself fascinating; Jefferson’s prominent position and enduring

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<sup>4</sup> Jordan, 375.

<sup>5</sup> Hook, Sidney. The Paradoxes of Freedom. Berkeley. University of California Press. 1962. p. vii.

influence make such an analysis vitally important and still valuable. Jefferson was inextricably linked politically and economically into the slaveholding plantation culture of eighteenth-century American South. He grew up on one of the great plantations in Virginia and maintained slaves throughout his life, even bringing several on his travels throughout Europe and to the congress at Philadelphia in 1776.

The Shadwell plantation where Thomas Jefferson grew up was one of the largest and wealthiest in Virginia. Family legend has it that his earliest memory, when he was only about three years old, “was of being carried on a pillow by a mounted slave on the journey from Shadwell to Tuckahoe.”<sup>6</sup> This recollection is of psychological and symbolic significance because it demonstrates the intimately close yet nevertheless servile position that he would come to view many of his slaves. Jefferson’s paternal ancestry was Welsh and his father, Peter Jefferson, was characterized by his son as strong in body and mind, yet he died in 1757 when Thomas was only fourteen. Although the eldest, the estate was not entirely left to him as was the custom under the rules of primogeniture, but rather divided up among the eight children. Thomas Jefferson ultimately inherited over 5,000 acres on the Rivanna River and more than 30 slaves from his family holdings.

Dr. William Small, professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at William and Mary where he enrolled at sixteen, was the first significant intellectual influence on Jefferson. He viewed Small as a “father” who “filled up the measure of his goodness to me” by introducing him to his good friend, George Wythe. From 1762 until 1767 Jefferson studied law under Wythe, a prominent attorney who was active in the legislature. It was also during this time that Jefferson began to build what was to become

Monticello near his original family plantation. An insatiable intellectual appetite led Jefferson to devour books on all subjects and conduct experiments of many different sorts on his plantation. Jefferson kept a *Farm Book* with intermittent records of fifty-two years of plantation management, including inventories and distribution lists concerning more than a hundred slaves.<sup>7</sup> His intense interest in agriculture was reflected in the meticulous records he kept. From all appearances Jefferson was well established and had available all the benefits afforded to the planter elite in colonial Virginia. Fawn Brodie comments that, “What is really astonishing is that he became a revolutionary at all. How could this young aristocrat, master of over a hundred slaves, owner of thousands of acres, adored by an amiable and deferential wife, have come very early in his life to risk hanging?”<sup>8</sup>

Jefferson entered the political arena with his election to the House of Burgesses in 1769. In his unfinished Autobiography written at the age of seventy-seven, Jefferson recalled that, “I made one effort in that body for the permission of the emancipation of slaves, which was rejected: and indeed, during the regal government, nothing liberal could expect success.”<sup>9</sup> This proposal made with Richard Bland was the first failure for the legislator, and the passion of opponents to Bill 51 was not forgotten by Jefferson even in the twilight of his life. The proposal more accurately called for voluntary manumission and an end to the slave trade rather than emancipation of all the slaves, and even its historical credibility has been questioned by some modern scholars.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Brodie, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>9</sup> Autobiography, 5.

<sup>10</sup> see Kennedy, Roger. Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery and the Louisiana Purchase. New York : Oxford University Press, 2003.

The force behind the American Revolution was concentrating in Virginia and presented a significant challenge to the British colonial leadership. “No other political society in revolutionary America or, indeed, at any later time in American history has produced so many gifted leaders,” notes one scholar, “Patrick Henry and George Washington, George Mason and Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and John Marshall are only the most conspicuous of a whole galaxy of leaders contributed by Virginia to the revolutionary era.”<sup>11</sup> Jefferson observed that the Virginians were unique in that they, “can profess an unbounded love of liberty and of democracy in consequence of the mass of the people, who in other countries might become mobs, being there nearly altogether composed of their own Negro slaves...”<sup>12</sup> This hypocrisy was not ignored, but instead highlighted and used as evidence in support of independence by Jefferson in his subsequent writings.

It was in this atmosphere that Jefferson wrote A Summary View of the Rights of British America in 1774 where he criticized the “infamous practice” of slavery. His reputation as a scholar became nationally recognized with the unauthorized publication of A Summary View which was well received both in and outside Virginia. “Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day,” he asserted, “but a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period, and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate, systematical plan of reducing us to slaves.” It logically and methodically set out the argument against King George III of England and foreshadowed the legalistic format later found in the Declaration of

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<sup>11</sup> Greene, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, 380.

Independence. The popularity of this diatribe helped to secure Jefferson's position as the principal drafter of that seminal document.

Although Thomas Jefferson seized upon classical liberal political philosophies of the English Enlightenment in his early rhetoric, it was the original synthesis of these disparate notions of freedom into a coherent and persuasive argument that established him as the first author of liberty in America. The colonies were far from united states, and regional interests prevented the development of a consensus on precious few issues, most importantly slavery. In the initial draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had included language that described the slave trade as the perverse plot of an evil English monarch designed to contaminate colonists, taken virtually verbatim from Thomas Paine's Common Sense. The Continental Congress in the final draft deleted it to secure the support of southern slave holders and northern slave traders, and indeed the word "slave" does not appear anywhere in the final draft adopted July 4, 1776. Jefferson's section stated that the king:

...has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred right of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery into another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.<sup>13</sup>

Like most signers, Thomas Jefferson sought a "peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity" on the slave issue and shared the widely held view that the end of slavery was inevitable, believing that it should be "permitted to proceed peaceably to its ultimate effect." In the Declaration Jefferson captured the sentiment that the American Revolution was "both a triumphant and transformative moment in world history, when all laws and human relationships dependent on coercion would be swept

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, 175.

away forever.”<sup>14</sup> The fact that it purposely ignored the single most oppressive aspect of colonial plantation life undermined this “transformative moment.” The impact that the American Revolution, in particular the Declaration of Independence, had on other movements for freedom around the world demonstrated to Jefferson the universal appeal of such notions of freedom. In Latin America the document inspired the leaders of the independence movements of the early nineteenth century, including Antonio de Nariño and Francisco de Miranda, the forerunner to Simón Bolívar. It was even translated and incorporated word for word into some Latin American constitutions.

In 1780, he began writing a comprehensive response to a series of queries from François Marbois, secretary of the French legation at Philadelphia, on the geographic and demographic characteristics of the young nation. Over the next five years he sporadically composed and revised the manuscript, with the understanding that it was not to be publicly circulated. Despite Jefferson’s opposition to its publication, it was subsequently translated and quasi-anonymously released in 1785 as Notes on Virginia in France. It was well received by many in Europe for its descriptive discourses on a wide array of physical and social aspects of Virginia. Urged by James Madison and others to print an English edition, Jefferson reluctantly agreed to have John Stockdale of London produce a limited number of the corrected text in the summer of 1787 bearing his name for the first time. The concern that Jefferson had over Notes was due to the highly controversial positions he espoused on several divisive issues, most importantly slavery and its underlying racial justifications.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellis, Joseph J. Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation. New York : Alfred A. Knopf. 2001. pp. 89.



In Notes, Jefferson reveals in uncharacteristically frank terms his belief in racial parity between the native and white populations.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he describes at length in disparaging commentary his observations that concluded the physical and mental inferiority of the negro race.<sup>16</sup> “I advance it therefore as a suspicion only,” summarized Jefferson, “that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.... This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.”<sup>17</sup>

The first direct address of slavery occurs at the conclusion of Query VIII entitled “Population” where Jefferson presents one of the clearest insights into his always complicated and often contradictory attitudes toward slavery:

567,614 inhabitants of every age, sex, and condition. But 296,852, the number of free inhabitants, are to 270,762, the number of slaves, nearly as 11 to 10. Under the mild treatment our slaves experience, and their wholesome, though coarse, food, this blot in our country increases as fast, or faster, than the whites.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that in this passage he not only highlighted the ratio of free men to slaves in Virginia, a serious concern that Jefferson would increasingly dwell on in the

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<sup>15</sup> “... We shall probably find that they [Native Americans] are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the ‘Homo sapiens Europæus.’” in Thomas Jefferson. Notes on the State of Virginia. William Peden. Ed. Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press, 1982. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Jefferson proceeds for over 10 pages to offer evidence supporting his belief in black inferiority, a significant portion that comprises greater than half of the entire section of “Laws”. As examples he noted, “To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral... Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?... The circumstance of superior beauty, is though worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?... They [blacks] seem to require less sleep... Their griefs are transient... In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection... Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior.” 138-139.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 87.

coming years, but also the increasing rate of population growth in the slave community. The threat of slavery to American society challenged him on several levels – moral, ethical, social, economic and political – but the danger became most real to Jefferson the scientist when couched in mathematical terms. The data on the growing number of slaves in the United States made the consequences that any eventual emancipation would bring to both black and white populations increasingly destabilizing. He continued that:

During the regal government, we had at one time obtained a law, which imposed such a duty on the importation of slaves, as amounted nearly to prohibition, when one inconsiderate assembly, placed under a peculiarity of circumstance, repealed the law. This repeal met a joyful sanction from the then sovereign, and no devices, no expedients which could ever after be attempted by subsequent assemblies, and they seldom met without attempting them, could succeed in getting the royal assent to a renewal of the duty. In the very first session held under the republican government, the assembly passed a law for the perpetual prohibition of the importation of slaves. This will in some measure stop the increase of this great political and moral evil, while the minds of our citizens may be ripening for a complete emancipation of human nature.<sup>19</sup>

Writing privately to a small and enlightened French audience, Jefferson portrays the legislative efforts of the House of Burgesses as unified in its efforts to end the slave trade in Virginia when, in fact, there was far from a consensus on the matter, as was the case in other southern colonies. Remember that as a member in 1769, Jefferson and Bland introduced Bill 51 “for the permission of the emancipation of slaves”, but were soundly repudiated. The eventual legislative successes in ending the importation of slaves was due more to the fact that the slave population in Virginia was large enough that importation was no longer necessary than a belief among legislators, many of whom were planters like Jefferson, that slavery was on a course towards its ultimate extinction.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 88.

The efforts toward legal emancipation was discussed later in Query XIV entitled appropriately "Laws". Only second in length to his section describing "Productions Mineral, Vegetable and Animal", "Laws" and the preceding discourse on the Virginian "Constitution" reflects Jefferson's extensive legal background. Jefferson outlines his plan for the deportation and establishment of nations abroad specifically for slaves, probably in Africa. While not included in the bill itself, it was to be added as an amendment that slaves:

...Should continue with their parents to a certain age. then be brought up, at the public expense, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses, till the females should be eighteen. and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms. implements of household and of the handicraft arts, seeds, pairs of the useful domestic animals, &c. to declare them a free and independent people, and extend to them our alliance and protection, till they shall have acquired strength; and to send vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants; to induce whom might migrate hither, proper encouragements were to be proposed.<sup>20</sup>

The solution for Jefferson was to get rid of the problem of slavery altogether through deportation than deal with the challenge of integration. To make up for the labor shortage, he proposed encouraging white settlers from Europe to immigrate to the United States. Anticipating a challenge to this position he continued:

It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions that will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.<sup>21</sup>

Thus to Jefferson, the tragic legacy of racism, deep seeded in both free and slave populations, made any dream of emancipation impossible. To do so would unleash

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 138.

conflict that he very well believed could have thrown the nation into a devastating civil race war.

Thomas Jefferson repeatedly characterized slavery as a thoroughly corrupting practice to both the communities of slaves and free men. most pointedly in Query XVIII entitled Manners. Although hardly two pages, Jefferson levels a passionate and personal attack against the consequences of slavery:

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do. If a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passions toward his slave. it should always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated. and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities.<sup>22</sup>

In this excerpt, Jefferson attributes the example that the planter sets for his children. It is not difficult to read into this section his own personal experience in Shadwell where he witnessed first hand the reality of daily slave life. The problem for Jefferson is that within the climate of slavery, the plantation complex, both the slave and the master is dehumanized. The institution is itself to blame, according to Jefferson:

The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those despots. and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriæ of the other... With the morals of the people, their industry is also destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labour for for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 162.

himself who can make another labour for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour.<sup>23</sup>

He continued,

The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.<sup>24</sup>

With the successful outcome of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson no longer could attribute the continued existence of slavery to English malfeasance or indifference. Despite his ruminations of divine intervention, Jefferson sees slavery as a very real threat. With the French and Haitian Revolutions upon the horizon, the freedom that Jefferson unleashed concerned him greatly. “We have a wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go,” he lamented, “Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.” Regarding the end of slavery Jefferson commented,

...As to the mode of emancipation, I am satisfied that that must be a matter of compromise between the passions, the prejudices and the real difficulties which will each have their weight in that operation. Perhaps the first chapter of this history, which has begun in St. Domingo [Haiti], and the next succeeding ones which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity, and furnish an answer to the difficult question Whither shall the coloured emigrants go? And the sooner we put some plan under way, the greater hope there is that it may be permitted to proceed peaceably to its ultimate effect.<sup>25</sup>

Identifying slavery in its legal and economic aspects as incompatible with the notions of liberty and freedom, Bolívar and Jefferson both acknowledged that it could not be sustained under a democratic system. Both agreed that its gradual elimination was essential, but retained slaves – Jefferson throughout his life and Bolívar until he agreed to free his slaves in exchange for assistance from Pétion. While each faced a different type

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 162-63.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 163.

of situation, both Jefferson and Bolívar viewed slavery as a remnant of their colonial past that prevented the full realization of the ideals they espoused.

### **Simón Bolívar and the Paradox**

The Spanish colonies in South America achieved freedom at a price higher than Simón Bolívar ever imagined. From April 1810 to December 1824, he led a series of military campaigns against forces loyal to the Spanish Empire throughout the lands that encompass modern day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. More than any other political or military figure in the Spanish-American Wars for Independence, Bolívar emerged the most successful and celebrated, and still is venerated throughout Latin America as ‘El Libertador’. Simón Bolívar is aptly known as the “George Washington of South America” due to his military leadership in the independence movements and subsequent role as the central political character of the new republics. Yet in addition to his considerable achievements on the battlefield, he was also instrumental in the construction of post-revolutionary governments in South America. “To take a fanciful parallel form the revolution of the Thirteen Colonies,” observed one scholar, “it is almost as if Washington and Jefferson had fused into a single personality.”<sup>26</sup>

As a product of the colonial plantation complex, Bolívar was ideologically situated between two competing sets of demands. On one hand he was educated in the liberal reasoning of the English Enlightenment that celebrated the rights of the individual and the belief that government was a social contract among equal members in a society. On the other hand he was a product of the Spanish colonial elite, trained in the ways of

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<sup>25</sup> Jefferson. “Letter to St. George Tucker. August 28, 1797.” *Papers*. vol. 29. pp. 519.

<sup>26</sup> Collier, Simon. “Simón Bolívar As Political Thinker.” Unpublished Essay, 2001. pp. 1.

the military and the belief in hierarchical, authoritarian order and corporate unity among its members. Bolívar was of white, Indian and black extraction – the three racial components of Latin America. Within this context, Bolívar sought to create democratic systems that were both idealistic and pragmatic. For Bolívar, as with Jefferson, the paradox of freedom was in effectively implementing these revolutionary notions within a slaveholding society that was not ready, or even capable at the time, of realizing the true consequences of independence. As experience would unfortunately demonstrate, his ambitious plans ultimately failed due to the limitations that political and social constraints placed on his initial vision of the post-revolutionary era. Indeed, one of the clearest insights into his later political thinking was his instruction, “Do not adopt the best system of government, but the one that is most likely to succeed.” In striving to address the legacies of slavery and racial inequality Bolívar ultimately sacrificed his ideals in favor of pragmatic solutions; a precedent that would have severely damaging consequences to the consolidation of stable, democratic nations in Latin America. Slavery was not abolished in Venezuela until 1854, and its legacy cast a long shadow beyond then. Simón Bolívar attempted to reconcile the conflicting values of a soldier with those of a statesman, and in the process, confronted the inherent tension that also faced Jefferson; that of a planter striving to completely change an established system of which they themselves are a product.

Simón Jose Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Ponte Palacios y Blanco was born into a wealthy and prominent Venezuelan family in 1783. during the final year of the American Revolution. His ancestors had emigrated from northern Spain two centuries earlier, and included in the family lineage were descendants of European,

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African, and Indian heritage. While this genealogy did place limits on advancement within the strict Spanish system of racial classification, it would later become a powerful symbol in his effort to unite all races of South America. As the youngest of four, Bolívar grew up in Caracas and on his family's sprawling cacao plantation at San Mateo in Aragua. He observed first hand the social stratification that characterized a slave community. Nearby Caracas was at the time a bustling export center of commerce that was dominated by Spanish ruling and the creole landed elites. "The Venezuela Bolívar had been born into was a quintessential plantation society," notes Harvey, "rich in natural resources, it sustained three classes of people: at its pinnacle, a Spanish colonial overclass; beneath them, a criollo class of wealthy landowners and traders, locally born and often of mixed blood; and the ordinary people, many of mixed blood, many of pure Indian descent, but the majority black, some still slaves." Bolívar was raised primarily by one such slave since his birth, Hipolita, whom he loved as a mother and nicknamed affectionately 'la Negra Matea.'<sup>27</sup> Hipolita would remain close to Simón throughout his life and their relationship significantly shaped his early conceptions of race and of the nature of slavery. "She nourished my life," he wrote, "I know no other parent than her."<sup>28</sup> Bolívar's father died when he was three, his distant mother six years after that, and he was then entrusted to the care of his uncles, who promptly arranged private tutors for young Simón.

Under the direction of Simón Rodríguez, a radical and eccentric academic who was active in the independence movement, Simón Bolívar was educated in the political

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<sup>27</sup> Harvey, Robert. Liberators: Latin America's Struggle for Independence, 1810-1830. John Murray : London, 2000. pp. 72, 60-69.

<sup>28</sup> cited in Worcester, 9.



concepts of Anglo-American Enlightenment thought. In addition to the writings of Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Smith and Rousseau, Bolívar seized upon the ancient classics of Socrates, Plato and Homer. Along with his academic responsibilities, Rodríguez directed an intense regime of physical exercise, riding and swimming as well as survival training at San Mateo. In 1797, Rodríguez was forced to flee from Caracas to Spain after being implicated in a local uprising. Bolívar was placed in a military academy that had been founded by his grandfather, the Whites of Aragua, where he excelled thanks to Rodríguez's rigorous preparation. Later influences, such as Francisco de Miranda, acknowledged as the precursor to Bolívar, and onetime tutor Andrés Bello regarded as the intellectual father of South America, helped to direct his political strategy in later years, but Simón Rodríguez would remain the single most influential figure in the formulation of his views on freedom and slavery.

Bolívar began what was to become a lifetime spent in constant travel in 1799 when he was sent to Europe to complete his education like many other young men of his class. It was at a time when an explosion of intellectual activity swept the continent. There he reunited with Rodríguez and continued his study over the next several years while abroad. During his grand tour, Simón Bolívar formed several important relationships that would later become instrumental in securing international support for independence from Europe. One such figure was the noted German explorer and naturalist Baron Alexander von Humboldt whom he met in the Parisian salon of Fanny de Villars. Humboldt had traveled throughout South America and written Political Essays on the Kingdom of New Spain in which he stated that "although conditions in South America are favourable to such an enterprise [independence], it lacks men capable of

carrying it out.” This commentary had a profound impact on Bolívar and his later correspondence with Humboldt, who also maintained a close relationship with Jefferson, reveal some of the more illuminating aspects of the geopolitical concerns that he faced as the leader in the movement for independence.

In Rome, Bolívar experienced his legendary epiphany upon the Aventine Hill. In the company of Rodríguez, who recounted the story for history in near spiritual terms, and his friend Fernando Toro, Bolívar passionately devoted himself to the cause of liberty. “I swear before you, I swear by the God of my fathers, I swear by them, I swear upon my honor and by my homeland,” he proclaimed, “that I shall not let my arm rest, nor my soul repose until I have broken the chains laid upon us by our Spanish oppressors!”<sup>29</sup> Recounting the “sterling virtues and gross crimes” of the Roman empire, Bolívar noted, “This civilization which rose in the East has revealed all its aspects and characteristics here; but, as for solving the great problem of human freedom, it would seem that this has been ignored, and that the identity of this mysterious stranger, freedom, will come to light only in the New World.” Whether Rodríguez and Bolívar embellished this experience for dramatic effect or not, the moment in Rome remained a major turning point where his political ideas of freedom and military training first united with a goal no less than the overthrow of the Spanish Empire and liberation of a continent.

On his return trip in 1807, Bolívar journeyed along the eastern seaboard visiting Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston. He observed first-hand the United States in Thomas Jefferson’s final year as President, noting “for the first time in my life I

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<sup>29</sup> Salcedo-Bastardo, 63.

have seen rational liberty.”<sup>30</sup> His eight years abroad exposed Bolívar to people and places that helped to shape his vision of an independent homeland where reason and freedom ruled. In an interview with an English newspaper in 1825, Bolívar summed up the strongest of his influences by noting:

In my youth, I was introduced to and inspired by the writings of the great French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who opposed tyranny and believed government should exist by the will of the people. I also admired and copied the military tactics of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, including the quick movement of troops and the use of highly emotional patriotic speeches and proclamations to motivate soldiers, though I must add that I hated the emperor’s despotism. Finally, I looked to the recent North American revolution, which led to the independence of the United States, as an example.<sup>31</sup>

It was thus these three areas, rational political philosophy, Napoleonic military strategy and admiration of the American Revolution, that shaped the core of what was later to become Bolivarian political thought. The attempt to synthesize these disparate and conflicting elements into a coherent whole resulted in extremely complicated, and at times contradictory, models for the post-revolutionary republics in Latin America.

The cultural and political context to which Bolívar returned in Latin America could not have been better for an ambitious revolutionary. Inspired by the example of the American and French revolutions, creoles in Venezuela used much of the same rhetoric as the ideological base in their revolt against colonialism. As John Lynch stated,

The Enlightenment too exerted its influence, not so much in new political or philosophical ideas as in a preference for reason and experiment as opposed to authority and tradition. While these divergent trends may have been reconciled in the minds of intellectuals, they help to explain the inconsistencies in the formulation of policy, as modernity struggled with tradition. The principle aim was to reform existing structures rather than design new ones, and the basic economic objective was to improve agriculture rather than to promote industry.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Salcedo-Bastardo, J.L. *Simón Bolívar: The Hope of the Universe*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1983. pp. 27.

<sup>31</sup> “An Interview with Simón Bolívar.” *The Gentleman’s Magazine*. London. December 1825.

<sup>32</sup> Lynch. 3.

Imperial reforms that began under King Charles III of Spain were an attempt at the “rationalization of empire” which sought to modernize the administration of Spain’s holding throughout the Americas. But events in Europe and the monarchy’s inability to address new demands for autonomy and opportunity led to a growing support for revolution. Alienation from the Spanish Empire had prompted smaller, unsuccessful revolts in the past, yet they were becoming more common and increasingly violent. As with colonials in British North America, creoles in Spanish America were systematically denied rights and privileges afforded to Spanish-born citizens. “The gentry in the Venezuelan capital were laying separatist plots to seize political power, the only sphere of authority which they lacked – they already held economic, social and cultural power – for complete dominance.”<sup>33</sup> Frustration over exclusion from the political process and the subsequent economic consequences found an outlet in the campaign for home-rule. “In their sense of alienation in the new empire crafted from afar, Creoles were as frustrated as their counterparts in British North America...but they were more hesitant in their defiance of royal authority.”<sup>34</sup>

Bolívar sailed into this brewing storm and immediately began to help shape the movement. He founded the *Sociedad Patriótica de Agricultura y Economía* which served as a revolutionary organization and created a platform for independence, even offering the use of his plantation for separatist meeting – a treasonous offense. Langley states. “Bolívar explained the legitimacy of the independence struggle in words a Creole hacendado or even a Virginia planter readily comprehended...”<sup>35</sup> The catalyst for action

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<sup>33</sup> Salcedo-Bastardo, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Langley, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 188.

came, appropriately, from Napoleonic France. An invasion of troops forced the abdication of King Ferdinand VII on May 5, 1808, and a crisis of legitimacy struck creole leaders in the colonies. The opportunity was not lost on Bolívar and others who argued need for a responsive government of the people. For the beginning months, the movement remained in support of the monarchy as Spaniards and creoles alike rallied around the deposed King.

Until April 1810, Venezuelan Negro slaves belonged to a well-defined social group with rights and duties established by almost three centuries of Spanish colonial practice and legislation.<sup>36</sup> By 1811, the calls for independence had reached a fevered pitch and on July 5, a national Congress in Caracas, of which Bolívar was a delegate, declared independence for Venezuela and adopted a federal constitution. They also crafted a provision that abolished the privileges and legal discriminations of colonial bureaucracy, but basic economic inequality remained ensconced in the Spanish legal codes. Self-interest rather than a unifying political ideology convinced many of the value of independence and slaves were considered important, although not vital to the cause.

The First Republic, as it is known, was beset by problems from the beginning. A series of engagements did not secure a clear advantage for either loyalists or separatists. An earthquake on March 26, 1812 devastated Caracas and was quickly promoted by royalist sympathizers as a sign from God condemning such treason against the King. Finally in July, one of Bolívar's officers betrayed him and allowed the Spanish to take over the strategically important Puerto Cabello. Francisco de Miranda, the political head of the movement, capitulated and signed an armistice thus ending the sad first attempt at independence. Bolívar fled to Curaçao and then Cartagena in defeat. The collapse of the

First Republic was a brutal reality check for supporters of independence, particularly Bolívar. It would not be his last defeat, in fact it was not until 1817 that the military campaign began to successfully repel the Spanish, but it transformed Bolívar's overall outlook on governance:

Bolívar's conservative governments were consciously patterned after the English government, but they preserved the patrimonial nature of the government which had ruled in Spanish America for so long. He hoped for governments which would allow for the exercise of natural rights, but for the time being he saw the need for governments in which the greater good of the society was placed ahead of the needs of the individual.<sup>37</sup>

The unique combination of ancient and modern, democratic and authoritarian reveal a brilliant, if somewhat naïve, dialectical thinker. "Part of the fascination of Bolívar's political thought lies in the ways in which he sought to reconcile these broad liberal principals (which certainly remained his ideals, however long-range) with the turbulent realities of the Spanish America of his time."<sup>38</sup> In the wake of the collapse of the First Republic, though, Bolívar was forced to reassess the prospects for a successful independence.

Simón Bolívar issued his first comprehensive public policy statement in 1812 with his Manifiesto de Cartagena. He criticized the choice of a federal system for the First Republic, stating, "The federal system," he concluded, "although the most perfect and the most capable of providing for human happiness in society, is, nevertheless, the most contrary to the interests of our infant states. Generally speaking, our fellow-citizens are not yet able to exercise their rights themselves in the fullest measure, because they lack the political virtues that characterizes true republicans – virtues that are not acquired

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<sup>36</sup> Lombardi, 231.

<sup>37</sup> Walsh, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Collier, 3.

under absolute governments, where the rights and duties of the citizen are not recognized.” The belief that federalism was not appropriate, however desirable, was indicative of an underlying tension that ran throughout Bolívar’s thought. On one hand he saw the example of the American system as the most effective, yet became increasingly convinced that it could not work in the new nations in Latin America. The pragmatic military general thus chose to permit the inequality that plagued the new republics to remain.

In 1815, Bolívar sought arms and refuge from Haitian president Alexandre Pétion in return for a guarantee that he would free his slaves and emancipate those he liberated. Pétion agreed and in a decree issued in Carúpano on June 2, 1816, Bolívar proclaimed, “Our country’s policy of justice for all imperatively demands that each citizen have the rights that nature bequeathed to him; therefore I hereby decree absolute freedom for the slaves, who have suffered under the Spanish yoke for the past three centuries.”<sup>39</sup> Here Bolívar offers freedom from Spanish oppression in Europe, not from the local hacendados in Venezuela. He proceeds to outline the steps that each slave needs to follow in order to register for military service. The ease by which he agreed to abolish slavery shows how military necessity, philosophical belief and political expediency converged in Bolívar’s Latin America to signal the end of slavery. It was also easier for Bolívar to free slaves in Venezuela than it was for Jefferson in Virginia because they made up a smaller proportion of the population in Latin America. “Most European and American politicians who have foreseen the independence of the New World have held the opinion that the main obstacle to its attainment lies in the difference between the races that make up the people of this immense country...Between 15 and 20 million

people are scattered throughout this vast continent, of American Indian, African and Spanish origin, as well as those of mixed blood; and of these, whites are certainly in the minority," observed Bolívar in 1815:

Although the people of North America are a singular model of political virtue and moral rectitude; although that nation was cradled in liberty, reared on freedom, and maintained by liberty alone; and- I must reveal everything- although those people, so lacking in many respects, are unique in the history of mankind, it is a marvel, I repeat, that so weak and complicated a government as the federal system has managed to govern them in the difficult and trying circumstances of their past.<sup>40</sup>

He saw North Americans as the beneficiaries of an environment that nurtured and promoted the development of political freedom and democracy. "But regardless of the effectiveness of this form of government with respect to North America, I must say that it has never for a moment entered my mind to compare the position and character of the two states as dissimilar as the English-American and the Spanish-American. Would it not be most difficult to apply to Spain the English system of political, civil and religious liberty? Hence, it would be even more difficult to adapt to Venezuela the laws of North America." The laws were not immediately transferable and would not translate, for Bolívar, into adequate institutions. The reason for this was not because Bolívar saw it as more desirable or effective, for he in fact believed that it was the ideal, but rather because the nation itself was not ready for the liberty of their North American brethren:

But no matter how tempting this magnificent federative system might have appeared, and regardless of its possible effect, the Venezuelans were not prepared to enjoy it immediately upon casting off their chains. We were not prepared for such good, for good, like evil, results in death when it is sudden and excessive. Our moral fiber did not then possess the stability necessary to derive benefits from a wholly representative government: a government so sublime, in fact, that it might more nearly befit a republic of saints.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Escritos*, vol. 9, pp. 187.

<sup>40</sup> *Escritos*, vol. 4, pp. 174.

<sup>41</sup> *Escritos*, vol. 15, pp. 39.



For the Venezuelan Congress, stability and organized succession were put in place of the chaos of democratic elections and truly responsive governments. Bolívar instructed, “Legislators, slavery is the negation of all law, and any law which should perpetuate it would be a sacrilege.”<sup>42</sup> It was not looked to as the final plan, but an intermediary step in the process of full liberalization. Bolívar charged no less than himself for such a task:

Now that Spanish America has been freed from the yoke of Spanish oppression, I will work to prepare the people to accept the responsibilities of democracy. The barriers of origin, race, and color must disappear. I will also labor to bring all the countries of South America into a political union of cooperation for mutual benefit.<sup>43</sup>

The tempered admiration of the American experiment was essential to the paradox of freedom for Bolívar. While he acknowledged that the North American system was in his estimation the best, he also did not believe that his nation was mature for full freedom. Echoing Jefferson’s concern that the nation was not yet “ripe” for liberty, Bolívar conceded that prudence and time were needed and accordingly constructed his republic with a mixture of democratic and monarchical elements.

In his “Message to the Congress of Bolivia”, he outlined a final obstacle that slavery and race presented to democracy:

Every ten citizens will elect one elector, and thus the nation will be represented by a tenth of its citizens. Ability is the only prerequisite for this post. It is not necessary to possess property to have the august right of representing popular sovereignty. The elector must, however, be able to write out his ballots, sign his name, and read the laws. He must be trained in some skill or useful art that assures him an honest living. The only disqualifications are those of crime, idleness, and utter ignorance. Understanding and honesty, rather than wealth, are the sole requirements for exercising the public trust.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Escritos*, vol. 2, pp. 603.

<sup>43</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

<sup>44</sup> *Escritos*, vol. 2, pp. 597.

By removing the property requirement, Bolívar both promoted greater participation in the democratic process and clearly dismissed other qualifications, such as race, for office.

These sweeping new rights, it should be noted, were only extended to men in the selection of a legislature but represent a significant shift away from the planter-dominated political process of the past. The faith Bolívar had in the Bolivian public in choosing a legislative representative, though, paradoxically ended at the steps of the presidential palace.<sup>45</sup>

His Angostura Speech is the most vivid example of Bolívar's paradoxical view of slavery, a view shaped by his acculturation within a slaveholding society. "We are all born of the same mother," he said, "but our fathers, being of different origin and extraction, are all visibly different in the color of their skin; this dissimilarity brings with it an obligation of the greatest importance."<sup>46</sup> The racial definition of slavery that so pervaded Jefferson's thinking about emancipation was reinterpreted by Bolívar to see the need for an elimination of racial classification. He continues that, "Slavery broke its chains, and Venezuela found itself surrounded by new sons, who, in their gratitude, have transformed the instruments of their bondage into the arms of freedom."

Simón Bolívar wrestled with the competing demands of a soldier with those of a statesman throughout his life, especially following the collapse of the First Republic in Venezuela. With the harsh experience he gained through fifteen years of military and political conflict, the hopeful idealism that initially fueled Bolívar turned to despair in the

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<sup>45</sup> In the same document, Bolívar instructed that the President of the Republic was to be appointed for a lifetime and granted the choice of selecting a Vice President to succeed him. "By means of this device we shall avoid elections," states Bolívar, "which result in that great scourge of republics – anarchy, which is the handmaiden of tyranny, the most imminent and terrible peril of popular government."<sup>45</sup> He saw the stability of a life-appointed executive as necessary however undesirable. Monarchical succession in the executive and the equality of direct representation in the tricameral legislative failed as a solution to the competing interests in the new republic.

post-revolutionary years of South America. One of the most interesting and symbolic examples of this personal dichotomy can be seen in the two books he willed to the University of Caracas upon his death; Rousseau's Social Contract and Montecuccoli's Military Art. "Both these books will give me great pleasure in all respects," Bolívar wrote, commenting that they were of "inestimable value" to him. "Their authors are highly regarded both for the good and the harm they have done; their first owner is the honor and the despair of the human spirit." The owner he was speaking of was Napoleon, the hero he secretly emulated and publicly condemned, from whose personal library the books came. Waiting in his native Venezuela after Bolívar died was Hipoleta, the slave whose love sowed in Bolívar the seeds of emancipation and freedom, who received his body in tears.

### **Legacy of the Paradox of Freedom**

Aware of the influence that the American Revolution had on movements in Europe and in the Western Hemisphere, Thomas Jefferson was initially skeptical about the transferability of the inalienable rights of freedom to a slave holding Latin American culture. In 1787 he wrote to John Jay about a letter he had received from a Brazilian who requested assistance. The unnamed Brazilian businessman from Rio de Janeiro stated:

The conviction, that these usurpers against the laws of nature and humanity only meditate new oppressions, has decided us to follow the guiding light which you have held out to us, to break our chains, to revive our almost expiring liberty, which is nearly overwhelmed by that force, which is the sole foundation of the authority that Europeans exercise over American...In this state of affairs, Sir, we can with propriety look only to the United States, not only because we are following her example. but. moreover, because nature. in making us inhabitants of the same continent, has in some sort united us in the bonds of a common patriotism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Escritos. vol. 16. pp. 425.

<sup>47</sup> "To John Jay: Marseilles, May 4, 1787." The Writings of Thomas Jefferson. Washington, DC : The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association. Library Edition. 1904. vol. VI. pp. 114-115.

“They consider the North American revolution as a precedent for theirs,” responded Jefferson to Jay, “I took great care to impress on him, through the whole of our conversation, that I had neither instructions nor authority to say a word to anybody on this subject...That yet a successful revolution in Brazil could not be uninteresting to us.”<sup>48</sup> Citing the economic and political consequences that such action could provoke, Jefferson appeared to be supportive of independence in Latin America yet at that time reluctant to offer support and uncertain that it would ultimately be successful. He did, however, regard a general knowledge of the region and of the Spanish language as important.<sup>49</sup> The ambivalence that he held toward the prospect for independence reflected a strain of *realpolitique* that weighed the promotion of democracy against avoiding war with the England and Spain.<sup>50</sup> “But if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murders of our own children,” Jefferson warned on the continued practice of slavery, “the revolutionary storm now sweeping the globe will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land...but every day’s delay lessens the time we may take for emancipation.”<sup>51</sup>

By 1811, Thomas Jefferson had a new opinion on the matter of Latin American independence, though he retained old reservations that its people were not ready for the

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>49</sup> In his advice regarding the merits to learn to speak Spanish Jefferson stated, “Bestow great attention on this. and endeavor to acquire an accurate knowledge of it. Our future connections with Spain and Spanish America. will render that language a valuable acquisition. The ancient history of that part of America. too, is written in that language.” “Education of a Young Man” August 10, 1787. *Papers*. vol. 13. p.1057.

<sup>50</sup> “Do we wish to acquire to our own confederacy any one or more of the Spanish provinces? I candidly confess, that I have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of States...Yet, as I am sensible that this can never be obtained, even with her own consent, but by war; and its independence. which is in our second interest (and especially its independence of England). can be secured without it, I have no hesitation in abandoning my first wish to future chances. and accepting its independence, with peace and friendship of England, rather than its association, at the expense of war and her enmity.” “Alliance With Great Britain October 24, 1823” *Papers*. vol. 13. p. 175.

<sup>51</sup> Jefferson. “Letter to St. George Tucker, August 28, 1797.” *Papers*. vol. 29. pp. 519.

blessings of full liberty. Francisco Miranda had received financial support in New York City for his first unsuccessful campaign that year, and the U.S. Congress passed a resolution in favor of the Venezuelan movement for independence making the United States the first nation to recognize the establishment of the free countries carved out of the former Spanish colonies. The French and Haitian revolutions had forced Jefferson to significantly reassess the exportability of the American conception of freedom.<sup>52</sup> Haiti, in particular, presented the most troubling paradox for both men. It confirmed Jefferson's worst fears that slaves could not govern themselves. For Bolívar, Haiti was the model to avoid in the post-revolutionary republics. As sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe notes, "That it should be Jefferson as a hero of anti-imperial revolution but a slaveowner who first excluded Haiti diplomatically, and Lincoln, right after the Emancipation Proclamation, who first recognized it is indicative of this core symbolic role of Haiti."<sup>53</sup>

"Every kindness which can be shown the South Americans," Jefferson wrote to Madison, "every friendly office and aid within the limits of the law of nations, I would extend to them, without fearing Spain or her Swiss auxiliaries. For this is but an assertion of our own independence."<sup>54</sup> A sense of common interest emerged and the identification with a greater cause for freedom signaled a dramatic shift in Jefferson's thinking after the

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<sup>52</sup> Langley insightfully comments, "The North American war of independence provided an ideology and a model of republican governance. The Latin American struggle against empire, which commenced a generation after the American revolution had ended, liberated a continent. Both inspired the replacement of colonialism with new states and dreams of building nation. Yet neither struggle achieved what the Haitians brought about in twelve years: a nation that had destroyed colonialism, ended slavery, and proclaimed racial equality. The consequences were both inspiring and frightening. Haitian revolutionaries waged guerrilla warfare against Europe's mightiest powers. In the course of a devastating war they not only destroyed the Caribbean's most productive economy but eliminated its ruling class – in an era of expansion of the plantation economy and an increasing dependence on slave labor from the Chesapeake to Brazil." Langley, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Stinchcombe, 132.

War of 1812. He continued, "Interest then, on the whole, would wish their independence, and justice makes the wish a duty. They have the right to be free. and we a right to aid them, as a strong man has a right to assist a weak one assailed by a robber or murderer. That a war is brewing between us and Spain cannot be doubted."<sup>55</sup> The fact that Jefferson now believed that freedom in South America was a cause that the United States had an obligation to support, even if it meant going to war, illustrates how effective Bolívar's military and political campaign was internationally. A year later, Jefferson seemed even more convinced about the prospect for Latin American independence, yet still he held remaining doubts that the establishment of republican ideas throughout the Americas could be successful.

Yet, the enigmatic Jefferson continued to vacillate on the prospects for the future. For the same reasons that he could not see emancipation as a possible solution to slavery in the United States, mainly ignorance among slaves and bigotry among freemen, he doubted the success of the movements in Latin America. Jefferson continued:

But the question is not what we wish, but what is practicable? As their sincere friend and brother then, I do believe the best thing for them, would be for themselves to come to an accord with Spain, under the guarantee of France, Russia, Holland, and the United States, allowing to Spain a nominal supremacy, with authority only to keep the peace among them, leaving them otherwise all the powers of self-government, until their experience in them, their emancipation from their priests, and advancement in information, shall prepare them for complete independence. I exclude England from this confederacy, because her selfish principles render her incapable of honorable patronage or disinterested co-operation; unless, indeed, what seems now probable. a revolution should restore her to an honest government, one which will permit the world to live in peace.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "To James Monroe: Monticello, February 4, 1816." *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Washington, DC : The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association. Library Edition. 1904. vol. XIV. pp. 431.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 432.

<sup>56</sup> "Era of Good Feelings: To Lafayette, Monticello, May 14, 1817." *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*. New York : The Library of America. 1984. pp. 1408.

Jefferson seriously questioned the independence movement on the grounds that the conditions necessary for the responsible exercise of self-government, an educated population and a commitment from the leadership to democratic systems of government among the most important, did not yet exist in Spanish America. This would also be echoed by Bolívar. As with the end of slavery at home, freedom for the South American continent should be slowly implemented according to Jefferson. He was uncertain that republicanism would work and therefore advocated a gradual implementation of democratic freedoms in “enslaved” communities. To Adams he commented:

I enter into all your doubts as to the event of the revolution of South America. They will succeed against Spain. But the dangerous enemy is within their own breasts. Ignorance and superstition will chain their minds and bodies under religious and military despotism. I do believe it would be better for them to obtain freedom by degrees only; because that would by degrees bring on light and information, and qualify them to charge of themselves understandingly; with more certainty, if in the meantime, under so much control as may keep them at peace with one another. Surely, it is our duty to wish them independence and self-government, because they wish it themselves, and they have the right, and we none, to choose for themselves; and I wish, moreover, that our ideas may be erroneous, and theirs prove well founded. But these are speculations, my friend, which we may as well deliver over to those who are to see their development. We shall only be lookers on, from the clouds above, as now we look down on the labors, the hurry and bustle of the ants and bees.<sup>57</sup>

Written near the end of his life, Jefferson offers his reflections on the Latin American situation. “As it respects their own liberty,” he elaborated. “peace and happiness, we cannot be quite so certain. Whether the binds of bigotry, the shackles of the priesthood, and the fascinating glare of rank and wealth, give fair play to the common sense of the mass of their people, so far as to qualify them for self government, is what we do not

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<sup>57</sup> “To John Adams: Monticello, May 17, 1818.” The Writings of Thomas Jefferson. Washington, DC : The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association. Library Edition. 1904. vol. XV. pp. 170.

know."<sup>58</sup> Even with these fears, though, the changes in Jefferson's belief about Latin American freedom were becoming increasingly evident.

With greater racial diversity and a hacienda system of great estates that Jefferson never had to deal with, Bolívar struggled in forging national identity among a greater socially and economically diverse population. The universality of ideals were limited by the particularity of circumstances and resulted in the selective application of rights, a view in line with many of his contemporaries. This view evolved over time into an embrace of an earlier universalistic conception of freedom that extended to Latin America. "The imperial notion of freedom was expansion of productivity and government capacity by means of freedom...The freedom of planter governments in the colonies means by definition that arbitrary imperial governments do not have the right to interfere with their decisions. The freedom of the planters to do what they want with their property means that slaves do not have freedom, the right to do what they want."<sup>59</sup>

In 1823, Jefferson wrote to his friend and President of the United States James Monroe about the need for independence from European entanglements in the Western Hemisphere. Following the theme of Washington's Farewell Speech, Jefferson proclaimed, "America, North and South, has a set of interests distinct from those of Europe, and peculiarly her own. She should therefore have a system of her own, separate and apart from that of Europe. While the last is laboring to become the domicil of despotism, our endeavor should surely be, to make our hemisphere that of freedom."<sup>60</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup> "To Baron Alexander Von Humboldt: Monticello, June 13, 1817." The Writings of Thomas Jefferson. Washington, DC : The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association. Library Edition. 1904. vol. XV. pp. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Stinchombe, 319.

<sup>60</sup> "The Monroe Doctrine: To the President of the United States (James Monroe). Monticello, October 24, 1823." Thomas Jefferson: Writings. New York : The Library of America. 1984. pp. 1481-1482.



what would later be known as the Monroe Doctrine, Jefferson laid out a plan that sought to transform the Americas from a colonial extension of Europe into a new republican continent in which reason and the ideals of representation and liberty became the foundation of government.

Bolívar was frustrated with his desire to maintain unity while establishing effective political representation. "It is even more difficult to foresee the future fate of the New World, to set down its political principals, or to prophesy what manner of government it will adopt...It is harder, Montesquieu has written, to release a nation from servitude than to enslave a free nation."<sup>61</sup> A common theme in Jefferson and Bolívar discourse is the need for education and the emphasis on the development of an intelligent and responsible population. Jefferson believed that North and South lacked it. Bolívar believed that the North had it but that the South did not. As Jefferson observed,

But of all the views of this law none is more important, none more legitimate, than that of rendering the people safe, as they are the ultimate, guardians of their own liberty. For this purpose the reading in the first stage, where *they* will receive their whole education is proposed, as has been said, to be chiefly historical. History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations: it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views. In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate, and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are therefore its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree...The influence of government must be shared among all people. If every individual which composes their mass participates of the ultimate authority, the government will be safe; because the corrupting the whole mass will exceed any private resource of wealth: and public ones cannot be provided but by levies on the people.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "Jamaica Letter." Obras. vol. 7. p. 116-125.

<sup>62</sup> Notes, 148-9.

As the product of colonial plantation society, the paradox was evident in their daily lives, and subsequently manifested in their writing and actions. Although separated by generational and geographic barriers, they were exposed to very similar formative experiences through their studies and travel. They corresponded with some of the same people over identical problems and each commented on the other and the movements they led, albeit never in direct correspondence. Jefferson and Bolívar had their identity, wealth and political power intimately tied to the plantation complex. Among their many roles, the one that was most central to their views on freedom and slavery was that of planter. In practical and symbolic terms, plantation agriculture defined these men and, in turn, their understanding of the concepts of freedom and slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The top priority that Jefferson and Bolívar initially placed on the survival of their young republics necessarily forced potentially divisive issues down below the surface. The initial exuberance of independence produced ineffective government and gave way to the sober challenges that required a more centralized and less free society. The paradox that was so clearly in conflict with the principals of freedom was seen as justified by many, including Jefferson and Bolívar, if it helped maintain unity and order at the cost of enslavement and disenfranchisement. However, in allowing the paradox to remain, Jefferson and Bolívar unknowingly allowed it to perpetuate itself until dislodging it from national identity required civil war.

The paradox of freedom was slavery, yet also much greater than strictly within the context of slavery that Morgan discussed. It symbolized a more fundamental dilemma that Jefferson and Bolívar wrestled with; the true realization of freedom in a society that

was unable to accept the true consequences of its actions. In their efforts at political independence, the evolution of their thought on how widely this could be realized reflected a deep understanding of the problems of their nation. Jefferson and Bolívar reassessed their initial views and wisely tailored them to ensure the long-term success of the new republics. In doing so, however, they knowingly left issues unaddressed that would only be settled with renewed domestic armed conflict.

As the product of a colonial planter elite, Jefferson and Bolívar were surprising actors in that they had much to lose in revolution, and both ultimately died in debt despite significant inheritances of land and slaves<sup>63</sup>. In other respects, however, they were just the figures to lead the movements for independence that so completely transformed the political, economic and, over time, the social structures of the western hemisphere. Put another way, it was unlikely that they would do it but could only work if they did.

Slavery and the broader international plantation complex within which Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar lived shaped their ideologies in significant ways. The rhetoric of the independence movements they each led was based on an enlightened conception of freedom that opposed the continued political and economic “enslavement” of the English and Spanish colonial governments. Indeed, the abusive and exploitative relationship with Europe was often characterized by Jefferson and Bolívar in terms of master and slave, with the underlying belief that slavery was highest charge they could levy against colonialism. In one respect, it is truly surprising that the slaveholding leaders of a creole planter class in the Americas would even consider a revolution, much less use the vocabulary and images of the very institution that posed the clearest obstacle

to freedom to frame their arguments for independence. The types of slavery that Jefferson and Bolívar experienced were different in several respects, depending upon a variety of demographic and geographic factors, social and religious norms and, most importantly, their respective colonial legacies. Despite these unique contexts, however, Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar were both profoundly influenced by slavery and each struggled with the contradictions that it presented to them and to the new American nations in their writings. "Great leaders become great and they become leaders," noted Erik Erikson, "precisely because they themselves have experienced the identity struggle of their people in both a most personal and a most representative way." Jefferson and Bolívar were acutely aware of the paradox of freedom inherent in their revolutions for independence yet were unable to truly achieve the profound social transformation that independence entailed within the context of a slaveholding plantation society in the Americas.

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<sup>63</sup> Jefferson owed over \$100,000 to debtors in the final years of his life and was forced to sell many of his assets, including slaves, to cover them (Brodie, 23). Bolívar also had lost much of the wealth inherited from his family and his will

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