

PRIMARY SOURCE *from* Proclamation of 1813 by Simón Bolívar

Venezuela declared its independence from Spain in 1811. However, Spain regained control of the country by July of 1812. Simón Bolívar fled to New Granada—present-day Colombia—to continue the fight against Spain. Chosen to lead an army to drive the Spanish from Venezuela, Bolívar issued this proclamation in June 1813. He appealed to Venezuelans in the city of Trujillo for support in liberating Venezuela from Spanish rule. By August, Bolívar's army captured the capital, and Venezuela gave Bolívar the title of liberator. According to the proclamation, what was Bolívar's mission?

Venezuelans: An army of your brothers, sent by the Sovereign Congress of New Granada has come to liberate you. Having expelled the oppressors from the provinces of Mérida and Trujillo, it is now among you.

We are sent to destroy the Spaniards, to protect the Americans, and to reestablish the republican governments that once formed the Confederation of Venezuela. The states defended by our arms are again governed by their former constitutions and tribunals, in full enjoyment of their liberty and independence, for our mission is designed only to break the chains of servitude which still shackle some of our towns, and not to impose laws or exercise acts of dominion to which the rules of war might entitle us.

Moved by your misfortunes, we have been unable to observe with indifference the afflictions you were forced to experience by the barbarous Spaniards, who have ravished you, plundered you, and brought you death and destruction. They have violated the sacred rights of nations. They have broken the most solemn agreements and treaties. In fact, they have committed every manner of crime, reducing the Republic of Venezuela to the most frightful desolation. Justice therefore demands vengeance, and necessity compels us to exact it. . . .

Despite our just resentment toward the iniquitous Spaniards, our magnanimous heart still commands us to open to them for the last time a path to reconciliation and friendship; they are invited to live peacefully among us, if they will abjure their crimes, honestly change their ways, and cooperate with us in destroying the intruding Spanish government and in the reestablishment of the Republic of Venezuela.

Any Spaniard who does not, by every active and effective means, work against tyranny in behalf of this just cause, will be considered an enemy and

punished; as a traitor to the nation, he will inevitably be shot by a firing squad. On the other hand, a general and absolute amnesty is granted to those who come over to our army. . . .

And you Americans who, by error or treachery, have been lured from the paths of justice, are informed that your brothers, deeply regretting the error of your ways, have pardoned you as we are profoundly convinced that you cannot be truly to blame, for only the blindness and ignorance in which you have been kept up to now by those responsible for your crimes could have induced you to commit them. Fear not the sword that comes to avenge you and to sever the ignoble ties with which your executioners have bound you to their own fate. You are hereby assured, with absolute impunity, of your honor, lives, and property. The single title, "Americans," shall be your safeguard and guarantee. Our arms have come to protect you, and they shall never be raised against a single one of you, our brothers. . . .

Spaniards and Canary Islanders, you will die, though you be neutral, unless you actively espouse the cause of America's liberation. Americans, you will live, even if you have trespassed.

from Vicente Lecuna and Harold A. Bierck, eds., *Selected Writings of Bolívar* (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), Vol. I, 31–32. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., *Documents in World History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 89–90.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing Facts and Details

1. What did Bolívar hope to accomplish?
2. According to the proclamation, why were Venezuelans justified in rebelling against Spain?
3. **Making Judgments** Do you think Bolívar's policies in dealing with the Spanish and the Americans were fair? Why or why not?