

My work in progress "Biography of the Death of Simon Bolivar," Milagros Socorro (Venezuela)

On December 17, 2007, one hundred and seventy-seven years after the death of Simon Bolivar, Venezuela's national hero and the leading figure in the independence of several South American republics, a commemorative event was held at the National Pantheon, resting place of the *Libertador's* remains. There, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that Bolivar had not died of tuberculosis, but had been poisoned.

He was not the first to question the cause of Bolivar's death. Many doctors in various fields of specialization and historians from different countries have investigated the case. In fact, one can find literature discussing this subject as early as 1915. During the twentieth century, several meetings took place with specialists and scholars of various South American countries to analyze the evidence and reach a final conclusion. In all cases, the scientific community agreed that Bolivar died of pulmonary tuberculosis, thus supporting the diagnosis of Dr. Révérend, a French doctor who treated Bolivar during his last 17 days in Santa Marta, Colombia, where he died in 1830. So the issue seemed to be settled until the current Venezuelan head of state questioned this conclusion, adding that the remains that lay in the Pantheon could be false.

From that moment, I began an investigation regarding what happened to the remains of Bolivar, and the various theories that have been woven around his death and the authenticity of the bones; theories that range from the rational scientific approach to the most bizarre (because the subject fascinates academics as much as it does adventurers of all kinds).

As a result, I decided to write a *Biography of the Death of Simon Bolivar*, which is not only a story of the adventures 'lived' by a handful of bones but also of the detailed documentation of the attempts by President Chavez and his government to twist the story in an effort to turn the history of Venezuela into a mere preamble for Chavez's own emergence on the political scene.

My research aims to dismantle the myths and outright lies, and to write a story that will fascinate the reader. All this without resorting to fiction, not even in a single paragraph--it is not necessary, the facts are intriguing enough, eccentricity abounds and, more often than not, one is overcome by genuine emotion.

Right now my research is quite advanced, but every step I take seems to lead me to another unsuspected place, and I find that there is still a wealth of material to review and file. That is why I am seeking support to complete the investigation by devoting my full attention and time to writing the book, which has been conceived as a non-fiction story for an extended audience (not limited to Hispanic people or communities aware of the existence and trajectory of Simon Bolivar).