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IMAGINING BOLÍVAR AND BOLIVARIANISM: BUILDING VENEZUELA WITH TEXTBOOKS, 1959-2013

This study presents two main arguments. **First**, the (re)interpretations of Simón Bolívar in school textbooks are always present in Venezuela and not limited to any specific government. The construction of narratives on Bolívar is an integral part of state-building projects and nationalism. Evidence from cross-temporal analysis of 21 primary school textbooks published between 1959 and 2013 unveils a general pattern of how each administration, in accordance with its own political and economic stances and goals, distinctively interprets El Libertador, his actions, and "Bolivarianism."

Second, the decades-long excessive focus on Bolívar's heroism and the lack of critical analysis of him in the textbooks contribute to the strengthening of the cult of personality. This, in turn, provides a "raw material" for a charismatic, populist leader to exploit, connect with the people, and rise to power.

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1960s

THE GLORIFICATION OF BOLIVAR IS
UBIQUITOUS, ALONG WITH A NARRATIVE
CONSTRUCTING BOLIVAR AS THE
SYMBOL FOR UNITY



1970s

BOLIVAR IS EXTREMELY LIONIZED AS
THE MOST IMPECCABLE HERO IN THE
WORLD HISTORY. THE LIBERATOR'S
DESIRE FOR PAN-AMERICANISM IS
FREQUENTLY HIGHLIGHTED

1980s

THE CULT OF BOLIVAR REMAINS
INTENSE; BOLIVAR'S DYING WISHES TO
SEE HIS MOTHERLAND UNITED MAKES A
COMEBACK

*"Así está Bolívar
en el cielo de
América, vigilante
y ceñudo, con el
inca al lado y el
haz de banderas
al lado."*



1990s

BOLIVAR IS EXALTED NOT ONLY FOR HIS
INNATE EXTRAORDINARINESS BUT FOR
HIS PERSEVERANCE IN HARD TIME

2000s-2010s

THE MAIN GUIDING NARRATIVE OF
EVERY LESSON, BOLIVAR IS DEPICTED AS
THE DEFENDER OF LIBERTY, EQUITY, AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE



General political development in Venezuela in each decade:

the 1960s: civil unrest between urban leftwing guerrillas and security forces

the 1970s: massive oil revenue, pan-American solidarity/nationalism

the 1980s: deep economic crisis and recession

the 1990s: political instability, neoliberal reforms

the 2000s-2010s: petrodollar-driven growth, increased social spending, leftist populist leader in power