



**American Journal of History and Culture**  
(ISSN:2637-4919)



# THE UNVEILING OF TWO MONUMENTS OF THE LIBERATOR: SIMÓN BOLÍVAR IN NEW YORK CITY (1921), AND SIMÓN BOLÍVAR IN BOLÍVAR, MISSOURI (1948)

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores two important moments in Bolívar's image and cultural history: first, president Warren G. Harding's speech during the ceremony of the unveiling of the equestrian statue of the Latin American Liberator, Simón Bolívar, in the city of New York in April 19, 1921, narrating the facts behind the story of the monument created by the American artist, Mrs. Sally James Farnham. Furthermore, this investigation includes original photographs that were taken during the ceremony and that were disseminated by the Addresses Delivered on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Statue of the Liberator Simón Bolívar Presented to the City of New York by the Government of Venezuela; The American Magazine of Art, and The Colombian Review. Second, this investigation analyzes the unveiling of the statue of the Latin-American Liberator, Simón Bolívar in 1948 in the city of Bolívar in the State of Missouri, including information from the speeches given by the president of the United States of America, Harry Truman, and the Venezuelan president, Rómulo Gallegos. This study also includes a set of eight original photographs that were taken and disseminated during both ceremonies in New York City and in the city of Bolívar in the State of Missouri.

**Keywords:** President Warren G Harding; Simón Bolívar; Sally James Farnham; Equestrian Monument; Liberator; President Harry Truman; President Rómulo Gallegos; Missouri; City of Bolívar; Venezuela; Statue of Simón Bolívar.

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### How to cite this article:

Rafael Arreaza Scrocchi. THE UNVEILING OF TWO MONUMENTS OF THE LIBERATOR: SIMÓN BOLÍVAR IN NEW YORK CITY (1921), AND SIMÓN BOLÍVAR IN BOLÍVAR, MISSOURI (1948). American Journal of History and Culture, 2020,3:15.



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Website: <https://escipub.com/>

## 1. PRESIDENT WARREN G. HARDING AND THE EQUESTRIAN MONUMENT OF SIMÓN BOLÍVAR BY SALLY JAMES FARNHAM IN 1921

In the year 1922, the *American Magazine of Art* started its first page of the volume 13, No. 9, published in September, with a black and white photograph of the Statue of Bolívar made by the American sculptor, Mrs. Sally James Farnham (1869-1943). Mrs. Farnham, was considered the first woman in charge of creating a monumental image of the Latin-American Liberator riding his horse representing the Bolivarian era of emancipation. This statue of Bolívar was a gift from the Venezuelan government to the people of the United States of America, and it was erected in the city of New York in April 19, 1921. As indicated in a biographical note:

In 1916, Sally competed against twenty other sculptors to win a highly prized commission from the Venezuelan government to create a heroic monument of Simon Bolivar, the great South American liberator. Despite numerous setbacks and five hard years of work, the monument was a great success when completed. Heralded as the largest bronze ever created by a woman, the monument was dedicated on April 19, 1921 before a crowd of thousands in Central Park. President Warren G. Harding, whose bust Sally would later model, gave the keynote address. Sally later said that the experience was "the greatest day in my life." For her great accomplishment, she was awarded the highest honor bestowed by the Venezuelan government, the Order of the Bust of Bolivar<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting reference to Farnham's statue was mentioned by Doctor Esteban Gil Borges, minister of foreign relations of the United States of Venezuela during the inauguration of the monument of the Liberator Simón Bolívar in New York in April 19, 1921. During his speech, a recognition was given to the finalized creation of Mrs. Sally:

The hands of a woman shaped this statue that my country [Venezuela] offers to the United

States as a token of perpetual friendship; the hands of a woman gave the eternal relief of bronze to the life that was a prodigious dream of heroism, of beauty and love. By granting to one of your daughter's the privilege of the maternity of glory, my country sought to double the significance of this homage and to fuse in a noble symbol the greatness of a heroic thought and the spiritual grace of American womanhood, whose tenderness and energy have contributed to the erection of this home of civilization that is your country.<sup>2</sup>

In the unveiling of the statue also participated the mayor of the city of New York, Mr. John Hylan; the governor of the state of New York, Nathan L. Miller; Doctor Santos Domínici, minister of Venezuela; Beltran Mathieu, ambassador of Chile; Doctor John Basset Moore, president of the Pan American Society of the United States; Doctor Rafael H. Elizalde, minister of Ecuador; and his Excellency president Warren G. Harding, who spoke about the similarities between Washington and Bolívar during his first visit to New York since winning the presidential elections. President Harding condensed in 29 paragraphs his observations about the relationship between Venezuela and the United States, mentioning and taking under consideration the similarities and the achievements of George Washington and Simón Bolívar in many aspects, primarily emphasizing the importance of the results of their political accomplishments in contemporary history. President Harding also incorporated topics of union and friendship between the United States and Venezuela, and included his vision of what Washington and Bolívar left to these two nations and to the world:

It is not too much to say that out of the liberations wrought by Washington and Bolívar grew the republican constitutional system which is America's gift to mankind. Our constitutions are the models after which are fashioned the fundamental laws of a world won to democracy. Whether they looked to the north or south, or whether the beacon fire was Pan America, in the

New World burned the great torch to light the way to constitutional freedom, and hope was assured by outstanding example.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, president Harding while speaking in front of a crowd of diplomatic personnel from different countries, a convoy of American troops, and spectators that visited the site to observe the ceremony and appreciate the monument, started his speech with a brief introduction dedicated to his fellow citizens of America noting that April 19 was an important date for the history of the United States because it was the anniversary of the battle of Lexington, historical event and date when the thirteen North American colonies commenced their search for emancipation. President Harding proceeded wishing that April 19 would open new doors to a reciprocal relationship between Venezuela and the United States, and also mentioned an importance comparison between the careers of the two founding fathers and their democratic views, their strategies in the battle fields, and their search for peace. Moreover, president Harding described how Washington and Bolívar had in common a good and sophisticated education, a common sense for freedom, their wise and democratic spirit, and their hopes for a republican constitutional system. There is also a reference with regards to the difficulties lived by North America and South America during the time these two regions fought for their independence, and president Harding explains how Americans fought against an unreasonable king, whereas South Americans fought against a despotic and brutal system. For president Harding, the geographical conditions played a fundamental role too, and he shared his thoughts about how isolation in South American soil had a negative impact in developing a stronger union amongst its people, whereas in North America when the insurrection of the thirteen colonies happened, people united to fight as one single nation fragmented in thirteen federated states.

Another interesting aspect mentioned by president Harding is how Simón Bolívar had the

vision to not only observe the problems of South America, but also to identify these matters in a prophetic way which gave Bolívar the respect and even the title of Liberator in 1813 with an astonishing admiration and devotion by the people of South America, and by all the progress he accomplished through his ideals and patriotism. President Harding also said:

I feel that we Americans, North and South, are entitled to hold that our democracy has come as a light into the world of international relations, and that it will show us a way out of the world's present troubles into a day when mankind may know peace and plenty and happiness, and when the first duty of organized society may be to promote the welfare of its members rather than to array itself in power against the threat of its destruction.<sup>4</sup>

President Harding talked about the importance of the doctrine adapted during the term of president James Monroe, and how much of an impact this proclamation had to the nation and to the world. Critical thoughts were shared about how other countries disapproved Monroe's doctrine and the way in which the United States interfered against other countries, however, positive ideas were also referred, and Puerto Rico is indeed included as an example of these ideas while mentioning that the United States has a loyal relationship with Latin-America as it can be seen with the reciprocity between Puerto Ricans and Americans Citizens. Finally, president Harding spoke about the union of Latin-America and the United States noting the importance of the Pan American people working together for a more cohesive region, and understanding the importance of the moral and democratic values established by Simón Bolívar in Venezuela. President Harding gratefully accepted the statue of the Liberator while saying: "I rejoice in this testimony of the gratitude of Venezuela, and acclaim the statue as a symbol of the deep-lying sympathy and shared regard which cements the nations of those two continents".<sup>5</sup> The statue of the Liberator was finally unveiled and the image of Simón Bolívar

became part of the Central Park surroundings in the city of New York since April 19, 1921.

## **2. SIMÓN BOLÍVAR IN BOLÍVAR: HARRY TRUMAN, RÓMULO GALLEGOS AND THE IMAGE OF THE LIBERATOR IN MISSOURI**

During the term of the American president, Harry Truman (1884-1972), the image of the Latin-American Liberator, Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), had a special regard quite related to the reciprocal relationship the government of the United States had with Venezuela. Interestingly, the figure of Simón Bolívar was being disseminated in different countries through an array of presents given by the Venezuelan government (equestrian and corporal statues, busts, portraits, mosaics, murals, replicas of Bolívar's sword, books, silver coins and medals, stamps and a vast compilation of bibliography), as a token of appreciation to the Pan-American nations, and as part of a cultural and friendly tradition that started in the city of Caracas during the presidency of Antonio Guzmán Blanco (1829-1899) in 1870, and that later on became perhaps the most significant and extravagant Bolivarian celebration related to the physiognomy and accomplishments of the Liberator. This ceremony known as the "Apotheosis of Bolívar", a magnanimous commemoration emulating what the Greeks did for their gods, happened in July, 1883, as a tribute to the centenary of the birth of Bolívar (1783-1830). As part of this commemoration, the government of Guzmán Blanco requested the construction of many plazas, public parks and sites with the installation of several monuments, statues and busts depicting Simón Bolívar in bronze and marble, in order to redecorate Venezuela in a Parisian way, initiating and disseminating a cult for the image of the Liberator that since that moment onwards became a sort of a cultural necessity for the people of Venezuela. This monumental proliferation of the figure of Simón Bolívar became an important matter for new governments in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the case of the presidency of Rómulo

Gallegos (1884-1969), arrangements were made with the government of president Harry Truman to install and unveil a statue of the Liberator in a town named Bolívar in the city of Missouri in the United States in July 5, 1948.

An interesting brochure disseminated during the unveiling ceremony in July 5, 1948, included a photograph and a letter from president Harry Truman (see figure 5) expressing his feelings about this commemoration in the town of Bolívar in the State of Missouri:

I am more than happy to have been associated with the Venezuelan Government and the citizens of Bolivar and the State of Missouri in this great project. I am proud that we have made this a great day not only to the people of Bolivar and Missouri, but also to our neighboring American Republics in honor of the memory of Simon Bolivar on this day of Venezuelan and American Independence.<sup>6</sup>

Also, an excerpt from the speech of the Venezuelan president, Rómulo Gallegos, was included in the Commemorative Program of the unveiling ceremony:

It would be of no use to have come to render homage to the past, honoring the memory of the ones who were and are truly and perpetually great, if we would not learn here a profitable lesson. And when delivering, as I am formally doing, to the President of the United States of America in the name of the government and people of Venezuela, this statue of the Liberator of my country, so that he gives it to the people who honor his name, I trust it to their generous Bolivarian devotion as if I would give them a seed of love to Venezuela, so that they may plant it in their land and have it become the flower adorning the plant grown from this seed ... love to America, equally ours.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to mention that Rómulo Gallegos was indeed a famous and prolific Venezuelan novelist, the author of some of the most important novels in Venezuela and Latin-America. Gallegos wrote his masterpiece "Doña Bárbara" in 1929 during the dictatorship of Juan

Vicente Gómez (1857-1935), creating a new type of Venezuelan bucolic literature internationally acclaimed. Doña Bárbara was in fact depicted in the international movie industry, and a film about this novel was conceived between Mexico and Venezuela, *Doña Bárbara* (1943).<sup>8</sup> Rómulo Gallegos was the first Venezuelan president elected through popular vote, and sadly, he was removed from office with a coup d'état that happened only 9 months after the presidential election. Nevertheless, during his term in office the image of Simón Bolívar was established in a town in the State of Missouri in the United States of America. The city was named Bolívar after the Liberator, and it also founded its entire culture to be related to the image of Simón Bolívar. For instance, most of the businesses were named Bolívar: banks, markets, libraries, schools and other locations had something to do with the last name of the Liberator. The presidents Truman and Gallegos inaugurated this entire location by going around the city in a parade, driving a convertible, riding the local train, walking among the multitude, and encouraging the people of Bolívar, Missouri to become part of the Bolivarian celebration. Furthermore, the presidents Truman and Gallegos shared the stage and during the inauguration of the ceremony they heard the national anthems of both countries, and spoke about their founding fathers George Washington and Simón Bolívar in front of the Court House (see figure 6).

The moment of the unveiling of the bronze statue portraying Simón Bolívar was led by president Truman (see figure 7). The sculpture was publicly revealed showing the Liberator standing up and grabbing his sword with his right hand while holding a constitution with his left hand, reflecting an image of the Liberator in a confident position showing three important facts about Bolívar: 1) the presence of his martial career through his sword; 2) his political knowledge with the constitution; and 3) his international merits and recognition wearing in the center of his chest, the medal of honor

Bolívar received as a gift from General George Washington (see figure 8). With regards to the medal of honor, it is quite interesting to note that in 1919, the third volume of the journal *Inter-America*, dedicated two pages (263-264) to the story behind a letter that included a medal, a portrait and a lock of hair from General Washington to Bolívar. The letter was sent to Simón Bolívar from a family member of George Washington, and General Lafayette was the person who gave the letter to the Liberator. The content of the epistle included a special message to Bolívar: "LIBERATOR: An American of the family of Mount Vernon presents to you, through the honorable hands of the last of the generals of the independence of North America, the excellent Lafayette, a medal commemorative of the merit and the renown of the most positively grand and glorious man, a gift of the former capital of his native state and one that has been preserved in his family since the war of the revolution. To this souvenir is added a portrait of the great leader that contains a lock of his hair. Accept Liberator, these tributes offered to your virtue and to the illustrious services which you have rendered to your country and to the cause of mankind. May they be preserved in the archives of the liberty of South America in order that they may call forth the veneration of future ages and the homage of all Americans who, in a pure and victorious acclamation, salute you, Bolívar, the Liberator, the Washington of the south".<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the city of Bolívar in Missouri initiated in 1948 a new cultural approach to the image and the proliferation of the Liberator Simón Bolívar in the United States of America, merging the traditions of the people of the Bolivarian countries with the way of life of the American citizens. Through a reciprocal political, diplomatic and friendly relationship, the people of the city of Bolívar in Missouri opened the doors to new generations of habitants that chose this peculiar town as their destination, that as of today proudly shares the figure of the Liberator even in the school system named "the home of the

Liberators" <sup>10</sup> represented with an emblematic **IMAGES** image of Simón Bolívar riding his horse.



Figure 1. President Harding reading his speech about Simón Bolívar during the unveiling of the statue of the Liberator in New York City in April 19, 1921. The photograph was disseminated by: Ponce, de L. E. *The Colombian Review*. New York: Government Information Bureau of the Republic of Colombia, 1920, p.139.

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Photo by Underwood & Underwood

PRESIDENT HARDING SPEAKS AND NEW YORK FORMALLY GETS BOLIVAR STATUE

Figure 2. President Harding and the Venezuelan delegation during the unveiling of the statue of the Liberator in New York City in April 19, 1921. The photograph was disseminated by: Ponce, de L. E. *The Colombian Review*. New York: Government Information Bureau of the Republic of Colombia, 1920, p.129.



STATUE OF BOLIVAR  
BY SALLY JAMES FARNHAM  
ERECTED IN NEW YORK CITY, 1921  
THE GIFT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF VENEZUELA

Figure 3. *The American Magazine of Art*, vol. 13, no. 9, 1922. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23939258](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23939258).



Statue of  
THE LIBERATOR SIMÓN BOLÍVAR  
Sally James Farnham, Sc.

Figure 4. *The Liberator Simón Bolívar in New York: Addresses Delivered on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Statue of the Liberator Simón Bolívar Presented to the City of New York by the Government of Venezuela, Tuesday, April 19, 1921*. New York: American Association for International Conciliation Interamerican Division, 1921.

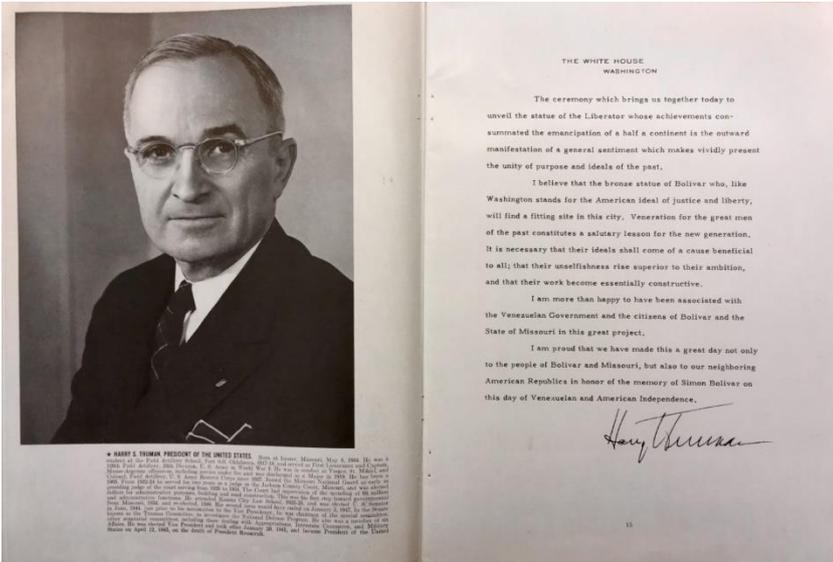


Figure 5. Truman, Harry S, and Rómulo Gallegos. *Commemorating the Dedication of the Statue of Simón Bolívar: The Great South American Liberator, Bolivar, Missouri, July 5, 1948*. Bolivar, Mo.: Junior Chamber of Commerce, 1948, p.15.



Figure 6. Description President Harry S. Truman (front row, right), President Romulo Gallegos of Venezuela (front row, left), and other dignitaries, standing on the reviewing platform during ceremonies marking the presence of President Truman in Bolivar, Missouri to dedicate a statue to Simon Bolivar. Standing behind President Truman is Missouri Governor Phil Donnelly. All others are unidentified. July, 5, 1948. Taken from:

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=35461>



Figure 7. Description: President Harry S. Truman and other dignitaries on the reviewing platform in Bolivar, Missouri. A crowd is gathered around the platform, and a statue of Simon Bolivar stands to the platform's right. President Truman is speaking. President Romulo Gallegos of Venezuela is seated on the front row to the left of the podium.

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=35410>



Figure 8. Description: A photograph of the statue of Simon Bolivar which stands in Bolivar, Missouri.

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=19239>

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5. Ibidem, p.24.
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7. Ibidem, p. 17.
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