

## Chapter 1: Independence Narratives, Past and Present

How do we tell the story of Latin American independence? This question introduces two of the key themes of the text, the first being the problem of creating a single story out of so many diverse experiences (all of Latin America did not even become independent during the same era, after all), and the second being the question of why we emphasize certain details and narratives over others. Where do we begin the story? Whose stories do we tell? How do we link different local processes together? Moreover, how do we tie Latin Americans to the outside world through these narratives?

The chapter provides a partial answer to these questions by offering three different ways to tell the story of Latin American independence. They include narrating Latin American independence as a story of freedom, a story of tradition, and a story of nationhood. Each narrative can be located in specific local histories and be generalized, in some sense, to a larger story of Latin American independence.

The documents that accompany the chapter, which include Bolívar's Letter from Jamaica, José Martí's Our America, and a speech by Hugo Chávez, offer related but distinct examples of what is at stake in narrating Latin American independence. In juxtaposing these three texts we can also think about change over time by considering what the concept of "America" meant in three different instances, each separated by nearly a century. We also have an opportunity to see what Chávez claimed as the Bolivarian vision, and to consider whether or not it was **the** legitimate legacy of Bolívar, or merely one of many.

### Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

What are the underlying issues in these texts?

What kinds of claims are being made?

What do they suggest about a useable past?

Whose points of view are being eliminated, silenced, or made illegitimate?

How can we connect them over time and space?

Is the past better used simply as a political tool, or as a mechanism for critiquing the very claims that invoke the past?