SIMÓN BOLÍVAR (1783–1830)
THE ANGOSTURA ADDRESS (FEBRUARY 15, 1819)

. . . many hazards confront you in your singularly difficult task, to found a state and even, one could say, create a new society.

****

Our societies hardly conserve a trace of what existed here before the Spanish came. Today, we are neither Europeans nor Indians, but rather a species intermediate between the two. American by birthright, European by legal inheritance, we are caught in the middle, having to maintain our position against the original inhabitants of *América*, on the one side, and against Spanish invaders, on the other. Even the land of our birth is not purely our own, an extraordinary complicated situation.

****

This is a consideration of vital importance. Let us remember that our people are not European, nor are they North American. Rather than being a direct offshoot of Europe, our people are a composite of Africa and *América*. This mixture began long ago in Spain, with its historical component of African blood and cultural influences, and today, properly speaking, it is impossible to assign us to any previously existing branch of the human family. Most of the indigenous people have been annihilated. Europeans have mixed with them and with the Africans who dwell here. The Africans have mixed with the indigenous and the Europeans. We are all children of the same mother, one could say, with different fathers come from afar, varying in blood and geographic origin, and so we differ visibly in the color of our skin. This dissimilarity places upon us a crucial obligation.

According to our constitution, and following the laws of nature, all citizens of Venezuela enjoy complete political equality, whatever their color. This kind of equality may not have been consecrated in Athens, nor more recently in France or North America, and yet we must consecrate this principle in Venezuela precisely in order to compensate for the dissimilarities that I describe. Equality, in my opinion, legislators, is the most fundamental basis of our existing system. Those who have studied the matter generally agree that all men are born with equal rights to share the benefits of society. They agree, too, that men are not born with equal aptitude to attain high social rank, because all men should practice virtue, but not all do, all should be courageous, but not all are.

****

Venezuela has been, is, and should continue to be a republic, a government based on the sovereignty of the people, one that abolishes slavery, preserves civil liberties, maintains the separation of powers, and forever banishes monarchy and special privileges.

****

Unity, unity, unity must be our motto! Nothing can save our young Republic from the abyss if we do not meld our population into a cohesive nation. The blood of our citizens is varied, so let us mix it together in the name of unity. Let us likewise balance and unify our governing institutions, raise a temple to Justice, and, under its sacred inspiration, create a new constitution for Venezuela.

****

Slavery had long covered the face of Venezuela with its barbarous and awful cloak. Venezuelan skies hung heavily with storm clouds and threatened to rain upon us a deluge of fire. Therefore, invoking all that is holy and humane, I called forth redemption to disperse the tempest and break the fetters of the slaves. By that act, the slaves were freed and these embittered stepchildren of Venezuela became transformed into a new generation of grateful sons.

Taken from Simón Bolívar, "Bolívar's Vision of an Orderly Republic: The Angostura Address," in *Latin American Independence: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. and eds. Sarah C. Chambers and John Charles Chasteen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 136–146.

GIOCONDA BELLI (1948–)
THE COUNTRY UNDER MY SKIN (2001)

We had taken over. The experience evoked images of the Allied troops arriving at towns abandoned by the Nazis at the end of the Second World War. That was the kind of joy the people greeted us with, and that was the power void in which we found ourselves: a clean-slate situation. The state had been completely dissolved. There were no courts, no police, no army, no government ministries. Just abandoned offices, deserted military bunkers. It was an odd sensation to have been subversive guerrillas and fugitives only a day earlier, and now, suddenly—as young as we were, no less—to find ourselves in a city deserted by the ancient regime, conscious that from then on, everything was up to us.

Managua was in a state of euphoric chaos, and some people did succumb to anarchy. The disenfranchised pillaged the uninhabited, locked-up houses of the rich and the military. Guerrillas with their red and black bandannas took the vehicles that the Somoza supporters had left behind in their frantic flight, and drove with glee through the city streets at full speed. Men and women from self-appointed popular militia units decided to assume the role of traffic police or general vigilantes, arbitrarily performing some arrests . . .

****

In Managua the initial chaos subsided relatively quickly, at least on the surface. The capital hadn't suffered nearly as much damage as some other cities, and apart from the boys in olive drab all over the place, Managua's day-to-day life began showing signs of a return to normality. The only exceptions were the nighttime skirmishes, which took longer to let up. . . . I remember hearing various members of the Sandinista leadership comment on how difficult it was for young men and women to live together in the same military barracks. For the first time ever, I heard someone suggest that perhaps women should be barred from active service. I considered that ludicrous and said so. How could they even think such a thing when women had already proven themselves to be as able fighters as men during the insurrection? Nevertheless, some months later, the top army officials . . . decided that from that point on women would only occupy administrative posts. They justified the decision by saying it was a question of money, that keeping men and women soldiers separate was a giant headache that incurred far too many additional expenses.

****

With time, the Revolution's stance grew more and more rigid. Powerful economic groups and the extremist Left began to challenge the revolutionary reforms—the former because their own interests were being threatened, and the latter because their extremist demands were not being met. . . . Rather than working toward an all-inclusive social pact, we decreed a new order because we felt it was the only way to remain true to the impoverished masses. Lacking a democratic tradition of our own, we took advantage of the authority we yielded. We might have considered ourselves very benevolent, but the truth was we had inherited a long legacy of authoritarianism.

I would like to think that with time, the Revolution could have muddled through its own confusion to eventually arrive at a fair, equitable balance. Sadly, we will never know what would have happened to our nation if Nicaraguans had taken full responsibility of the country's future, without foreign intervention. Ronald Regan began his presidency in 1981. His electoral platform stated: "We deplore the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua, as well as Marxist attempts to destabilize El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala."

All too quickly, the bad omens had become a reality.

Taken from Gioconda Belli, *The County Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War*. Translated Kristina Cordero (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 249, 262–263, 276–277.