

INTRODUCTION

Despite its cultural richness, fascinating history and spectacular geography, Latin America has remained a relatively dark continent to the rest of the world. The wilds of Patagonia, the oceanic plains of Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina, the majestic cordillera of the Andes and the sierras of Mexico, the tropical jungles of Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia - together with their inhabitants - are almost as hidden from general view as they were during their three centuries of existence under the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Even Latin-Americans - amply versed in North American and European culture - are often in the dark about their own continent. Few Mexicans could readily pinpoint the Bolivian city of Potosí on the map though it was colonial South America's most important producer of silver - and conversely few South Americans would know where to find its Mexican counterparts - Taxco and Guanajuato.

Yet in the nineteenth century this enormous region played a crucial role in developing the modern idea of the nation state; and along the way it launched an unprecedented assault against European imperialism - an assault that was as dramatic and fundamental in its impact as the rebellion of the thirteen states that broke away from Great Britain to form the United States of America.

The story of how the nations of Latin America achieved their independence is not just of historical and educational significance; it is also a tale of stupendous drama and pathos, idealism and betrayal, tragedy and romance, defeat and triumph set against a backcloth of some of the most varied and awe-inspiring geography on the planet. Colourful and rugged as the landscape in which they lived, those who led the revolt against Spain, men like Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, Antonio José de Sucre, Bernardo O'Higgins, Pedro Braganza and José María Morelos have acquired mythological status in those nations that claim them as their own. Others, like Tomás Boves, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia and Agustín Iturbide have left behind less savoury reputations. With the possible exception of Sucre, none of the great revolutionary leaders is uncontroversial; though one, Simón Bolívar, is an outstanding figure of world history; a man of supreme intellectual ability who combined the sensibility and linguistic command of a poet, with the daring of an inspired general and the shrewdness of a politician. It was Bolívar who spearheaded the liberation of present-day Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and the country that adopted his name - Bolivia. But the cast-list is as long as it is fascinating, and the above names merely a few of the most luminous.

The independence movements in Latin America and the break-up of the Spanish and Portuguese empires constitute one of the great "untold" tales of human history. And the rich panoply of characters who took part, as well as the scenic splendour of the setting make it ideally suited to the medium of documentary drama, to a blending of the best historical storytelling with the techniques of feature film. We believe that both the themes and the treatment will evoke widespread interest, not only in the Americas (North as well as South) but also in Europe, not least because four European countries were deeply involved in the revolutions. Spain lost one of the largest empires the world has known, and Portugal the heart of its wealth and power; France's invasion of the Iberian peninsula under Napoleon woke Latin

America from centuries of colonial slumber; and Great Britain harboured Latin-American revolutionaries, and became an important provider of military personnel to the revolutionary cause. Some of the most illustrious names associated with the wars of independence are Irish, Scottish and English - Ferguson, Miller, Wilson, Rooke. Lord Cochrane, Tenth Earl of Dundonald, commanded the fledgling Chilean navy with which he cleared the Pacific Coast of Spanish naval power, and he went on to perform the same feat against the Portuguese in Brazil. William Miller became a Brigadier-General and Governor of Potosí in Bolivia. Bernardo O'Higgins, liberator and first president of Chile, was half Irish and educated in England. Irishman Daniel O'Leary not only achieved the rank of General in the revolutionary army but also wrote the most important historical account of the war in northern South America. He is a national hero of both Colombia and Venezuela.

Through her democratic foundations and her enlightened constitution, the United States exerted another kind of influence, namely as a source of inspiration to a region oppressed by centuries of colonialism. The writings and deeds of Adams, Jefferson, Paine, Madison found their way through the Spanish barriers of censorship to reach the eyes and ears of the Latin-American revolutionaries; and the name of George Washington was revered throughout the southern continent.

Latin America's wars of independence raised questions that today are still the subject of intense debate: the proper balance between liberty and social justice, between centralist and federal forms of government, between individual rights and the rights of "the state", between free trade and regional economic development, between the exploitation of natural resources and their conservation, between nationalism and interdependence.

We envisage a series of documentary dramas structured round a narrative core, with dramatization of key scenes in a consistent format that will allow for character development. For the first Seven parts, we now have a detailed written narration in place. A draft one-hour script of Part One is also complete.

Part Eight - the final - will address how the Hispanic-American countries have developed since Independence to become as they are today. It will offer a picture of contemporary Latin America interpreted by and reflected in the peoples of the region - including the many native Indian communities that have survived the colonial and post-colonial eras, and it will address the problems of inequality and social injustice that remain one of the less edifying legacies of the region's colonial past.

Currently available:

- Synopsis
- Extended outline project summary
- Completed narrative for Parts One to Seven
- Draft one-hour script of Part One.

Note: the series was devised and written by Jeremy Fox, and accepted for development by Canadian-Colombian film producer/director Ramiro Puerta. Ramiro died in 2002, before work on the project could begin.

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