

I'm currently spending a lot of my time preparing for an exhibition on Spanish American Independence that will open in our Folio Society Gallery in May since this year sees the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence movements which began in 1810 and continued until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. You can expect lots of celebratory events both at the BL and elsewhere.

These independence movements were not simply striving for political and economic emancipation from Spain. They sought, in fact, to revolutionize and replace the whole colonial system that had been extant on the continent for over 300 years. From the outset the new republics formed out of the independence movements embraced the liberal principles of freedom, equality and social justice and sought to eradicate the socio-economic backwardness in the region through progressive constitutions that defended, among other things, popular education, which included education for women, the abolition of slavery and improvement in the social and economic conditions of the indigenous population. These were central issues championed by leaders such as Simón Bolívar, who fully understood that no lasting revolution could be achieved without radically challenging the oligarchic power left behind by the colonial regime. Unfortunately, Bolivar's project of a united and democratic Spanish America proved unfit for a society still deeply divided by regional conflicts, private economic interests and a rigid system of class division.

The exhibition will present a variety of materials from our collections to show the development of the independence movements and how they played out in a number of the Latin American countries most associated with this tumultuous period. Bolivar's dream of an American continent free of colonial and economic oppression continues to live on - as the Mexican revolution of 1910, the implementation of the socialist government in Cuba in 1959 and the current Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela attest. You can have a preview of an earlier version of the exhibition by visiting our online gallery at:

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/spanishamericanind/homepage.html>