

THE CLASSICAL POPULIST RETURNS:
HUGO CHÁVEZ'S POLITICAL STYLE AND PUBLIC IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the political style and public image of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. It argues that Chávez fulfills the criteria of a classical populist, in accordance with renowned cases of populism in Latin American history. His style is further analyzed through Chávez's relationship with his Venezuelan supporters and his diplomacy in the Latin American community. Three characteristics are emphasized: the radicalism of his image and policy, a casual and accessible approach, and the use of historical references. This thesis relies on primary sources such as speeches, interviews, and government publications, as well as media coverage of the Chávez regime. This study expounds the polarization of Venezuelan politics under Chávez, and connects his leadership to a larger trend in Latin American history.

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INTRODUCTION

Hugo Raphael Chávez Frías was a relatively unknown figure when he burst on to the political scene and won the 1998 Venezuelan presidential elections with a stunning 56% of the popular vote. Since that time, Chávez has become one of the most visible politicians in the world, frequently mentioned in international news. His involvement in important debates over themes such as capitalism and oil politics has elevated his status as a global leader in current affairs.

From an uncertain beginning filled with much speculation and debate over what kind of leadership Chávez would bring – some called him a military dictator-in-the-making, others a communist, or a dangerous populist – Chávez has now firmly established himself as a radical thinker, a spokesperson for the poor and underrepresented, and a vocal opponent against imperialism and neoliberalism. However, Chávez is not an “open and closed” book, but a man of multi-faceted character. Chávez is self-admittedly ever-changing, a function, some say, of his growing intellectual and political maturity.

Today Chávez is arguably the most renowned figure in modern Latin American politics, rising above Fidel Castro, the long-time emblem of an alternative economic model and the epitome of anti-Americanism in the western hemisphere. Chávez is now the most vocal opponent to the United States’ system of free-market capitalism, while strongly advocating increased solidarity among Latin American countries. Furthermore, regional politics are changing dramatically in the South. Latin America is undergoing a dramatic ideological shift, away from the strongly neoliberal dominance of the 1980s to a left-leaning progressive position. Currently, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia all have leftist governments in place, while several other countries approach election time with prominent leftist candidates in the running. Chávez is an important reason for this wind of change sweeping the region. His bold diplomacy and preferential trade undoubtedly have contributed to Latin America’s confidence in choosing a different direction than the United States’ Washington-Consensus¹ based, IMF-inspired agenda.

As a leader in all of these areas, Chávez was bound to concern the United States, especially as Venezuela is one of the world’s largest oil exporters, providing roughly

15% of U.S. oil imports. Consequently, the U.S. administration has kept a close watch on this “renegade” president, and professed their concern over his policies. Chávez is also of interest for academics. Venezuela has been one of the bastions of stable and working democracy in the typically volatile region of Latin America. Many political scientists and commentators have lamented the rise of Chávez, a former military officer, and the apparent dismantling of the democracy in Venezuela. All of these factors speak to Chávez’s prominence as an international figure worthy of serious attention.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis will examine Chávez’s political style and public image, in an attempt to explain his popularity and determine key characteristics in his interaction with Venezuelan supporters and Latin American leaders. To begin, Chávez will be examined through the lens of Latin American populism, helping readers understand the legacy of charismatic and progressive leadership in Latin American history and the context in which Chávez arose. To follow, Chávez’s image and style will be analyzed through his interaction with two main groups - his Venezuelan supporters and Latin American leaders – focusing on three key themes that are important in shaping his image: political radicalism, a personable and accessible approach, and the use of history.

In this manner, I hope to show why Chávez has been as successful as he has. It is not my intention to judge the merit or morality of Chávez and his movement, but merely analyze the reasons for his current popularity. As my objective is to explain Chávez’s appeal, I have focused on the favourable elements on which his political image is constructed. I have also highlighted some of the major criticisms of this controversial leader in order to present a more balanced representation. It is difficult to assess the degree to which his policy or his rhetoric has most influenced Chávez’s supporters and colleagues. Presumably, empty rhetoric would not have resulted in such immense political success, in terms of his favourable electoral outcomes and diplomatic advances in the Latin American community. Likewise, policy alone would not have generated the, at times, fanatical loyalty of his supporters, without the power of Chávez’s provocative and passionate speech. My intention is to provide a thorough examination of the motifs of Chávez’s political style and image, which include both discourse and policy.

With this objective in mind, the sources required for my research are mostly Chávez's direct speech, as acquired through interviews, public speeches and broadcasts, video footage, and government publications. Much of this material is accessible through the internet. The Venezuelan government has an extensive on-line service, providing many kinds of information to the Venezuelan people and the world. Presidential addresses are regularly posted on this site. The broadcast of Chávez's interactive radio/television program, "Aló Presidente," allows me to examine his weekly discourse with the public. Many other public services, such as policy announcements and status reports on the "Missions," are available through this medium.

In the scope of this project, several historical questions will be addressed. What political techniques have been successful in Chávez's case, and how are they related to earlier populists? Is populism still a viable option in contemporary politics? Has Chávez changed the populist model to account for Venezuela's particular economy and society? How malleable is populism to these changes? In addressing these questions it will be necessary to explore the definition of populism and how classical and modern forms differ.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Because Hugo Chávez is a relatively new figure, there has not yet been adequate scholarship conducted on his character or his governance. As Chávez's fame and popularity continue to grow, newly published works emerge ceaselessly, but few of these are academically rigorous or provide much of the historical context for Chávez. A small number of historians have done decisive works in this area. Richard Gott's book *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution* (the 2005 follow-up of his earlier *In the Shadow of the Liberator: Hugo Chávez and the Transformation of Venezuela*, 2001) is one valuable contribution. Gott, a British journalist and historian specializing in Latin America, provides the first significant English-language study that places Chávez into a historical and intellectual perspective. His book walks the reader through the various stages of Chávez's personal life and presents a thorough description of the Bolivarian movement, its origins, allies, objectives, and achievements. His attention to Venezuela's nineteenth century revolutionary experience is noteworthy, particularly his explanation of Bolívar's

place in Venezuela's historic identity. The 2002 doctoral thesis by Marines Morela Fornerino-Steeves of the University of Indiana also offers significant examination. This political scientist observes the democratic nature of Chávez's movement and draws attention to the importance of oil in not only Venezuelan political economy, but in the very psyche of the Venezuelan people. Michael McCaughan's *Battle of Venezuela* is a good overview for the public, describing Chávez's background, the nature of Venezuelan contemporary politics, and the progress of the Bolívarian movement. Julia Buxton's *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela*, published in 2001, is valuable in describing the historical background of Venezuela's political economy. Her book explains the democratic deterioration in Venezuela which produced the favourable conditions for Chávez's rise to power.

Various scholars have provided concentrated analysis on specific aspects of Chávez and his presidency. The book *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era*, published in 2004, compiles works from numerous scholars well recognized in their respective fields of study. The book deals with economic policy by Julia Buxton, popular opinion by Patricia Marquez, labour by Steve Ellner, and social polarization by Kenneth Roberts. Academics like Steve Ellner (the co-editor of the aforementioned book), Kenneth Roberts, Kurt Weyland, and Kirk Hawkins have also published numerous articles in academic journals about Venezuelan politics under Chávez.

Despite these contributions, certain potential areas of scholarly enquiry on Chávez have been overlooked, especially works that place Chávez in a regional and contextual analysis. A comparative study of Chávez's policies and style does not exist. Chávez has emerged as a principle leader in the current leftist slant in Latin America. Additionally, the leadership style of Chávez should be examined in juxtaposition with comparable individuals throughout Latin America's past and present, especially Latin American populists. The study of twentieth century Latin American populism would include figures such as Juan Perón (Argentina), Getúlio Vargas (Brazil), José María Velasco Ibarra (Ecuador), to name only a few. A famous contemporary, Fidel Castro of Cuba is also a worthy case for comparison.

There are many scholarly works on populism to draw upon for this analysis. However, work on Latin American populism is more limited. Michael Conniff, a leading

scholar in this field, was the editor of two books, *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (1982) and *Populism in Latin America* (1999), which are indispensable for the application of this political theory to regional cases. These books discuss the origins and development of populism in Latin America, while situating it in specific cases throughout the twentieth century. Carlos de la Torre's *Populist Seduction in Latin America: the Ecuadorian Experience* (2000) is a knowledgeable account of Ecuadorian populism, as well as populist theories in general, most noteworthy for its sociological analysis on the populist-follower relationship. Weyland and Roberts have made significant contributions in this area, both addressing the case of Chávez specifically. Additionally, Sheila Collins' article, entitled "Breaking the Mold? Venezuela's Defiance of the Neoliberal Agenda," is a useful source for examination of Chávez's economic policies, which harkens back to classical populist polities in the midst of neoliberal dominance.

A number of book-length interviews have also been published. Aleida Guevara March conducted a series of interviews that were published in 2005 in *Chávez, Venezuela, and the New Latin America*. Marta Harnecker's *Understanding the Bolivarian Revolution: Hugo Chávez talks to Marta Harnecker* (along with an earlier Spanish version: *Un Hombre, Un Pueblo*) was published in late 2005. Agustín Blanco Muñoz's publication is of special importance because it gives insight on the early Chávez; *Habla el Comandante*, published in 1999, consists of fourteen interviews conducted in the years between Chávez's release from prison in March 1994 and his presidential campaign in June 1998. As this period was a time of serious evolution in Chávez's political thought, it is a very valuable resource. Also a Havana publishing house released *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela* in 2003, a compilation of speeches by Chávez from December 2002 to January 2003.

Another resource that has become quite important to this project is the Venezuelan online news distributor, www.venezuelanalysis.com. This media outlet is pro-Chávez amid the overwhelmingly hostile media coverage of Chávez's career and presents articles from many different contributors. Additionally, articles published in Venezuelan newspapers throughout Chávez's career, collected from the National Library in Caracas, have given insight into how Chávez is portrayed outside his control. Because

my research is primarily based in media sources, it is, therefore, crucial to understand the complex nature of the various media sources I use before delving into the main purpose of my thesis.

MEDIA CHALLENGES

Although he has now served as president for eight years, the character of Hugo Chávez is still somewhat endowed with mystery. Why is this so? There are many reasons the image of Chávez in the media and in academic discussion is confused and contradictory.

One reason for this is that media coverage of Chávez has been decidedly antagonistic, (with growing exception outside of the U.S.) painting him as a dictator and troublemaker. The Venezuelan media has been overwhelmingly in opposition to Chávez. As might be expected, the media in Venezuela is owned by the upper class, who fall decisively in the anti-Chavista camp, and thus use their control over the media to try to undermine the legitimacy of the government and to weaken the president's popular support.² A culture of ethical responsibility in the media has never developed in Venezuela and therefore reporting suffers from a general lack of integrity and accountability. The constant misinformation and blatant fabrications presented in the news are due to the polarized political, economic, and social environment within Venezuela.

From the beginning, the owners of media outlets in Venezuela have applied their resources in an effort to remove Chávez from office. They used many different tactics. Chávez's military background was immediately called into question, with warnings from the press of his authoritarian tendencies. His relationship with Castro was an easy target; accusations that Chávez would turn Venezuela into another Cuba were frequent. During the 1998 election, old photos of Chávez embracing Castro were printed, with the caption reading "Traitor" and calling Chávez a subordinate of Castro.³ Chávez claims that, during the campaign, an oppositional radio company even hired a professional actor who imitated Chávez's voice and made outrageous threats to his opponents.⁴

In April 2002, the media owners went beyond blatant propaganda and criticism to collaborate in a full-blown conspiracy to overthrow the government. A more flagrant

attempt at a media's abuse of power can hardly be found than in this case. On April 11th -13th, a military coup was staged which temporarily removed Chávez from power. During these events, the private television channels either told the public that Chávez had resigned and that 'everything was under control' or, they completely ignored the attempted coup. As Venezuelan journalist, Eva Golinger, says, "This was an intentional distortion of news and censorship of the truth about a situation of critical importance to Venezuelan citizens and the international community."⁵ (Meanwhile, most U.S. media welcomed the new government, telling the American public that Venezuelan democracy was safe now that Chávez had 'resigned'.⁶) As the only government station was removed from the air, the public was largely unaware of the situation. Eventually the truth of Chávez's capture spread to the people by word of mouth, cell phones, and an emergency news bulletin assembled by a municipal press.⁷ On April 13th, the government-owned station came back on the air, and soon afterwards, a massive protest of Chávez supporters filled the streets. In the early morning, Venezuela's democratically elected president was returned to power.

Also, the role of the media in the opposition's *initial* success in the 2002 coup should be explored in further detail. The media was not only active in concealing the military revolt, but also in the unfolding of events preceding the revolt. On April 11th, two simultaneous rallies were held, one pro-government and one oppositional. When the marches turned physical, the media manipulated images to show the Chavistas as the perpetrators of the ensuing violence. The media footage incited anger and fear among the upper classes and triggered more conflict and fervid support for physical action against the government. Interestingly, the victims of the shooting were almost all Chavistas, and a closer look at the footage shows that the bullets of Chavista demonstrators were aimed atop a building where an alleged sniper had fired several shots. They were not shooting into "an unarmed peaceful crowd of opposition demonstrators", as told by the media.⁸

The "media coup" of April 2002 is an extreme case of media manipulation and propaganda. This incidence explicitly illustrates the powerful impact of the media on the political stability of a government body. Therefore, gaining authority over the media in Venezuela has always been an issue of primary concern for Chávez. In order to gain media access, Chávez had to confront the Venezuelan private media industry, which

openly despised him, and develop new media outlets to counter the negative portrayal and outright lies of his opponents.

Aside from the elitist and partisan Venezuelan media, international news has also been very critical of Chávez's government. The United States media has pursued a particularly antagonistic posture, attacking Chávez with allegations of authoritarian rule, communist intentions, corruption, and abuse of power. An analysis conducted by Eric Wingerter of *Venezuela Information Office* found that in the *Los Angeles Times*, only one of the 28 editorials on Chávez written since 1998 was not significantly disparaging. Chávez is regularly described as "caudillo," "dictator," and "strongman" in these articles.⁹ A similar study by Justin Delacour for the news website *Venezuelanalysis* documented the serious criticisms made in six U.S. newspapers during a short period (April 2002 to October 2004). He states that for every citation from the only two pro-Chávez Venezuelan historians, there were more than seventeen citations from anti-Chávez analysts.¹⁰

Since 1998, but especially after the 2002 coup, alternative media enterprises have been developed.¹¹ Several public radio and television stations now broadcast national news and government announcements, offering a different perspective on events. The international community as well has become more receptive to Chávez with the exception of the United States whose major media coverage on Chávez is routinely disparaging.

However, media like Telesur, Vive television, and other programs paid or supplemented by the Venezuelan government (or others which are openly pro-Chávez) must also be viewed with a critical eye, as they are certainly not above bias and agenda-seeking. In fact, there have been serious allegations of curtailment of press freedom. For example, Chávez has legislated that private networks televise certain government announcements that are of "national importance." These mandatory national broadcasts, called "cadenas", are recurrent and often last several hours at a time, evoking protest from the media.¹² Additionally, legislation was passed in January 2002 "to defend the right of Venezuelans to truthful information." This law strives to hold the media outlets accountable to honest programming.¹³ However, the negative potential of this law has led to many objections.¹⁴ Such fears were warranted on December 28, 2005 when Chávez announced the non-renewal of Radio Caracas Television's operating license.

Numerous human rights groups have condemned this move as an attempt to silence criticism of his regime, as RCTV is one of Chávez's harshest critics.¹⁵

The extraordinary polarization of contemporary Venezuelan politics makes objective journalism scarce and has been an obstacle to gaining a more profound understanding of Chávez and his government. For this reason, critical scholarship on this subject is in particular need. It is my hope that this thesis will attend to some of these inadequacies. First, in order to understand these complexities and controversies, we must examine not only Chávez's time in the presidency, but also his personal background and Venezuela's history.

VENEZUELAN HISTORY

In a region where political instability is a curse, and dictatorship and violent overthrow of governments are the norms, Venezuela's history has been quite exceptional. Venezuela's long-standing stable democracy has been an anomaly. Economically Venezuela was also considered a success story. Set apart from Latin America's history of poverty, Venezuela has enjoyed economic prosperity for the past century. As the fifth largest oil exporter in the world, Venezuela has benefited from enormous revenues, creating a high-class culture reminiscent of the finest European centers. The metropolis of Caracas, Venezuela's largest city with a present population of five million, boasts grand architecture, large and exotic shopping centers, and an extensive subway system. By appearance, therefore, Venezuela has seemingly evaded the dreary fate of many Latin American countries.

Events of the 1990s, however, brought out the ugly truth of the situation. Despite the city's modernity and affluence, one need not look far to notice the hypocrisy of this illusion. The reality is that the government sits atop the largest reserve of oil in the hemisphere, yet a 1995 statistic shows upwards of 70% of Venezuelans live in poverty.¹⁶ Another study finds similar results, stating that in the last twenty years alone \$250 billion was made in oil income for the country. In spite of this, fifteen million people are living in poverty.¹⁷ While the small upper class flew off to Miami for weekend shopping excursions,¹⁸ 67% of the people struggled to get by on \$2 USD a day.¹⁹ The country's oil wealth had for years gone directly into the pockets of politicians, the business elite, and

foreign enterprises, leaving the common Venezuelans with substandard social conditions. The oil boom in the 1970s gave the impression of opulence despite dramatic inequalities, but a sudden decline a decade later accentuated economic and social injustices. The effects of sudden price increases, dollar devaluation, and cuts to welfare spending were felt throughout society, with the middle and lower classes suffering the brunt of the depression. The hardships caused a drop in the middle class, from 28% of the population to 9%, over the last fifteen years.²⁰ “People are very angry at this miracle in reverse,” says Venezuelan scholar Arturo Usler Pietri, who claims that Venezuela should be by far the richest country in Latin America.²¹

As the economy suffered, the political system also came under serious scrutiny.²² What became plainly obvious was that Venezuelan democracy was merely a façade. While times were good, people were willing to accept the government’s many flaws, but in the midst of economic depression and elevated social tensions, the people became increasingly angry and cynical of the political order. The government rarely ever changed hands and was run exclusively by the elite members of society. Aside from voting privileges, the regular people had no contribution to political affairs. The common people were increasingly squeezed out of the political arena. As one scholar states, “Clientelist parties determined everything – from members of the Supreme Court, mayors, provincial governors and heads of the national labour federation down to the leadership of student groups, private clubs, and even contestants in the Miss Venezuela contest.”²³

The former political system was established in 1958 when the “Pacto de Punto Fijo” was made, an agreement between the two dominant political parties to share power. The moderately liberal Democratic Action (AD) and the more conservative Christian Democratic Party (COPEI) dominated Venezuelan politics until the turn of the century. Over the years, divisions between the state and the party grew as state finances were distributed to build ‘parallel’ organizations, and combat the influence of the Communist Party, which was a force in Venezuelan politics.²⁴ As Daniel Hellinger states, “divisions within party ranks were assuaged by common interest in gaining the largest share of power in the rent-seeking and rent-distributing state.”²⁵ Therefore, the AD and COPEI parties maintained this fragile agreement in order to preserve their privileged status. This

system, dubbed “Parti-ocracy” or “Pacted Democracy”, effectively excluded the common people, and alternative parties, from participation in government, and thus any say in the economic or social affairs of the country. In this divided and inequitable context, Hugo Raphael Chávez Frías arose.

CHÁVEZ’S PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born on July 28th, 1954 in a village called Sabaneta, in the Andean state of Barinas, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías was one of four children. The son of schoolteachers, Chávez naturally had a passion for learning, developing a love for history and literature at an early age. Chávez was also a gifted athlete and excelled in baseball. It was this passion that helped lead him to a career with the military. Hoping to further his prospects as a pro-baseball pitcher, Chávez signed up for military service in 1971 at age seventeen and moved to the “big city.” Being a young man in Caracas, where the social division was glaring, accelerated the development of his social consciousness. Also, Chávez was awakened by the enlightened culture of Caracas’ *Símon Bolívar University*. In the 1970s, a series of changes in the military led to the enactment of “Plan Andrés Bello”, which facilitated the inscription of young officers in the Venezuelan universities as an alternative to military institutions. Officers began university placements as a way to obtain necessary skills for nation building. Consequently when these young cadets finished their university schooling, they possessed professional skills, civilian contacts, and social sensitivity, which helps explain the political consciousness and activism in the contemporary Venezuelan military.²⁶ These experiences helped produce a keen political interest in Chávez.

On December 17, 1982, under the famous *Samán de Güere* tree (a national historic site in Venezuela), the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (MBR-200)* was formed. Here, Chávez and two comrades²⁷ pledged to change the government which they held to be corrupt and unjust. Here, they swore *Símon Bolívar’s* historic oath, which he vowed under that same tree 200 years earlier: “I swear before you, and I swear before the God of my fathers, that I will not allow my arms to relax, nor my soul to rest, until I have broken the chains that oppress us...”²⁸ Though their goals were unspecified and

vague, these men were passionate about the need for change, and they remained committed in their pursuit of it.

Chávez spread his newfound social vision to his colleagues and underlings. He used his position as class lecturer at the military academy of Caracas, which he held from 1980-85, to provoke and question young military officers and instill political consciousness. At times, however, Chávez's revolutionary ideas alarmed his superiors. In 1986, due to growing suspicion of a possible insurrection among the youth, Chávez was transferred out of Caracas to the remote location of Elorza in the state of Apure (in the southwest near the Colombian border). This did not discourage him, however. In the new post, Chávez pursued his search for life's truths and political ideals for the country. He spent time talking and learning from the Indigenous peoples in the area while coordinating civic-military projects and community development initiatives. By someone's great oversight, Chávez was transferred back into Caracas, and positioned in the Miraflores Palace, which enabled him to reconnect with his comrades and resume his conspiratorial planning.²⁹

His efforts were facilitated by a dramatic event which validated all of Chávez's revolutionary views and aroused sympathy and anger from many in the military: the Caracazo of February 27, 1989. When President Carlos Andrés Pérez instituted much-hated neoliberal reforms – austerity measures to combat low revenues from the oil market decline – thousands of people took to the streets in violent protest. Price increases, particularly in bus fare, enraged Venezuelans. In Caracas and other centers around the country, riots broke out. To re-establish order, Andrés Pérez ordered the military to use extreme measures, causing perhaps one thousand deaths (the exact figure is unknown, some argue that the number is closer to 2000), and a strong resentment within the military towards the government which had pitted them against their own countrymen, whom they were supposed to protect. This discontent was a major catalyst in the politicization of the Venezuelan military.

After years of plotting, Chávez and his cohorts decided to take action on February 4, 1992 and attempted to overthrow Pérez's government. Simultaneous action was to be taken in key military and government posts across the country. Because of numerous betrayals and certain miscalculations, the coup attempt was a failure. Chávez was

captured but was granted a few moments of airtime to speak to his supporters. In his press debut, Chávez accepted responsibility for the coup's failure and appealed for people to put down their arms and surrender in order to avoid any more unnecessary bloodshed. He apologized and announced that they were putting down their weapons "por ahora" indicating that he would later try again. This very brief moment gave him critical national exposure. "Por Ahora" became somewhat of a rallying cry. As reported in the daily journal *El Universal*, "The Venezuelan people refer to this celebrated phrase 'For Now' as when democracy opened its door to Hugo Chávez Frías with the task to complete his promise of transformation."³⁰ This was indeed significant because not only was Chávez promising that he would continue to fight for change, but he humbly and honestly accepted responsibility for his actions – a rare case indeed for Venezuelan politics.

A similar overthrow was attempted only ten months later by other dissident military officers, but also failed. Shortly thereafter President Carlos Andrés Pérez was impeached on charges of corruption and misappropriation of state funds. In a gesture of goodwill, and in view of popular empathy for the coup conspirators, the subsequent president, Rafael Caldera, ordered the release of Chávez.

It was then that Chávez decided to seek change through the ballot rather than the bullet. After his release from prison Chávez began traveling extensively, securing important alliances from disengaged political parties like MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) and Causa R (Radical Cause). In 1997, the new political party The Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR – Movimiento Quinta (V) Republica) was formed.

1998 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 1998 elections occurred during a long period of evident dissatisfaction with the government and the entire political system. There was a genuine desire for change in a huge sector of the Venezuelan population. As one commentator says, in the 1990s the people had a real sense of "moving forward."³¹ This desire was evident in pop culture: everything from colloquial language on the streets, which poked fun at politics, to the parodies of themes and characters of the very popular Venezuelan soap operas.³² As expressed in the violent outbursts of the Caracazo and marked support for the 1992

coups, there was an authentic revolutionary posture in the voters in the national elections throughout the 1990s.

Many Venezuelans favoured radical economic change. For example, President Carlos Andrés Pérez was elected on a campaign of anti-IMF austerity programs, which he blatantly betrayed early in his presidency, causing the violent outcry of February 1989. From Andrés Pérez onward, all politicians campaigned on anti-neoliberal platforms.³³

More than just economic change, Venezuelans wanted an overhaul of the whole political system. The clientalism of the dual-party system had intensified and was well known. The major political parties lost support. In the following presidential elections, there was an outright rejection of all established parties. In 1988, the AD and COPEI received 93% of the vote, but by 1993, combined the two parties received less than 50%.³⁴ The 1994 president-elect, Rafael Caldera, the former COPEI leader, won his presidency as an independent.

Therefore, Chávez's main competitor in the 1998 elections was not from either of the traditional parties, but an independent, Henrique Salas Römer. In the early part of the race, the competition appeared relatively even.³⁵ Once AD and COPEI realized that they were 'out of the running' they abandoned their own candidates and threw their support behind Römer in an attempt to stop Chávez. Their backing in fact had the reverse effect: Römer's fate was sealed as he now was perceived as a candidate of the establishment. Many gave their vote to Chávez, who was consequently seen as the only true option for change.³⁶

Some scholars argue even further to say that Chávez was elected simply because of the people's contempt for the entrenched parties. Julia Buxton points out that abstention totaled 36% and consequently Chávez came to power with the support of only one-third of the electorate, even though it was the highest majority win in Venezuela's democratic history. As she puts it, "His [Chávez's] victory should more rightly be viewed as a rejection of the old system, rather than a positive endorsement of the new Bolivarian vision. Chávez won power because all opportunities for peaceful revolutionary political change had been blocked and exhausted."³⁷ I am of the opinion, however, that Chávez's election was more than simply by default. Chávez offered many ideas and

programs that were enticing, and he presented an image that related well to the Venezuelan poor.

Hugo Chávez has served as president for over eight years and has repeatedly verified his popularity through numerous elections and referendums.³⁸ Chávez's popularity is substantial and enduring. In this thesis, I intend to illustrate how Chávez rose to such prominence by examining his relationships with two target groups: the poor majority in Venezuela and the Latin American community. First, however, it is useful to examine Chávez's political style within an established framework. Populism, as I will show, has produced numerous leaders throughout history who share similar characteristics.

¹ The phrase Washington Consensus refers to a set of neoliberal economic policies advocated by Washington-based international financial institutions.

² When Chávez came to power in 1999, the five main privately-owned television stations, and nine out of the ten major national newspapers were strongly against him.

³ Chávez, interview by Aleida Guevara March, *Chávez, Venezuela, and the New Latin America*. (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 2005), 24. The ad in question was actually taken in 1994, upon the presidents' first meeting, but the story read that Chávez just returned from Cuba, where he had been collaborating with Castro about Venezuela's future.

⁴ Ibid, 24. The statement was that Chávez was going to "fry all the Adecos [of the AD party] and the Copeyanos [of the COPEI party] in oil."

⁵ Eva Golinger, "The Media War Against the People: A Case Study of Media Concentration and Power in Venezuela" *The Venezuelan Reader: The Building of a People's Democracy*, ed. Olivia Burlingame Gombri (Washington: Epic, 2005), 98.

⁶ Julia Buxton, "Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* vol.24, no.3 (2005), 332.

⁷ Sujatha Fernandes, "Growing Movement of Community Radio in Venezuela" *venezuelanalysis.com*, December 26, 2005.

www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1637 and "The Revolution will not be Televised" prod. David Power and The Irish Film Board, dir. Kim Bartley & Donnacha O'Briain (Dublin: The Irish Film Board, 2003) Accessed as "Inside the Coup" *The Passionate Eye*, CBC, April 13, 2003.

⁸ See "The Revolution will not be Televised" - an excellent documentary, largely focusing on the coup events and how it was overturned by Chávez's fervent supporters.

⁹ Eric Wingerter, “Los Angeles Times Editorial Coverage of Venezuela, 1998-2006” *venezuelanalysis.com*, February 21, 2006.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1676>

¹⁰ Justin Delacour, “Strong Evidence of U.S. Media of Imbalance on Venezuela” *venezuelanalysis.com*, December 29, 2004.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1343>

¹¹ Before the Coup there was only one state-run station, but also a few community networks.

¹² “RSF denounces the government’s ‘improper use’ of requisitioning air time” April 10, 2002. *Reporters Without Borders*. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=1201

¹³ “Venezuela’s Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television Programming” *Venezuela Information Office*.

<http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/medialaw.htm> This website outlines the law and compares it to legislation in other countries, specifically in Latin America, showing the normalcy of its contents.

¹⁴ “Venezuela: Media Law Undercuts Freedom of Expression” *Human Rights Watch*, New York, Nov.24, 2005. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/11/30/venezu9754.htm>

¹⁵ Simon Romero, “A debate over censorship begins in Venezuela,” *El Nuevo Herald*/*New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2007.

¹⁶ According to the income-based poverty line used by the Poverty Project of the Catholic University Andres Bello (Matias Riutort, “El Costo de Eradicar la Pobreza” in *Un Mal Posible de Superar, Vol. 1*, UCAB, 1999) in Gregory Wilpert, “Venezuela’s Mission to Fight Poverty” *Venezuelanalysis.com*, November 11, 2003.

http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1051#_ftn6

¹⁷ Georgie Anne Geyer, “Poor Rich Venezuela: Miracle in Reverse” *The Washington Quarterly* vol.22, no.2 (spring 1999), 116.

¹⁸ Marvin Alisky, *Latin American Media* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982), 123.

¹⁹ Julia Buxton, “Economic Policy and the Rise of Hugo Chávez,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*. eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 113.

²⁰ Georgie Anne Geyer, 117.

²¹ *Ibid*, 116.

²² Venezuela is a presidential republic, where both the head of state and head of government are held by the president. It has four branches of government: the executive, legislative, judicial, and citizen’s. Since the 1999 Constitution, established under the Chávez government, the once bi-cameral legislature is now unicameral. It is a multiparty system.

²³ Sheila Collins, “Breaking the Mold? Venezuela’s Defiance of the Neoliberal Agenda” *New Political Science* vol.27, no.3 (Sept. 2005), 370.

²⁴ Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 14.

²⁵ Daniel Hellinger, “Political Overview: The Breakdown of *Puntofijismo* and the Rise of *Chavismo*” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict*, 31.

²⁶ Steve Ellner, “Hugo Chávez y Alberto Fujimori: análisis comparativo de dos variantes de populismo” *Revista venezolana de economía y ciencias sociales* vol.10, no.1 (ener.-

abr. 2004), 17. And Michael McCaughan, *The Battle of Venezuela*. (London: Latin American Bureau, 2004), 29-30.

²⁷ Jesús Urdaneta and Felipe Acosta Carlos. Francisco Arias Cardenas later joined the group.

²⁸ Bolivar's vow, in Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*. (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 38.

²⁹ McCaughan, 31 and Gott, 40-2.

³⁰ "Con la Juramentación se cierra el paréntesis de aquel 'por ahora'" *El Universal*, February 2, 1999, pg2(b)

³¹ Patricia Marquez, "The Hugo Chávez Phenomenon: What do "the People" Think?" in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict*, 207.

³² *Ibid*, 203.

³³ Kurt Weyland. "Economic Voting Reconsidered: Crisis and Charisma in the Election of Hugo Chávez" *Comparative Political Studies* vol.36, no.7 (2003), 827-8.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 827.

³⁵ Former Miss Universe Irene Sáez was projected to win in the early polls but dropped when she accepted COPEI endorsement. Then, by mid-1998, it was Salas Römer vs. the former coup leader. Kenneth Roberts, "Social Polarization and Populist Resurgence in Venezuela," in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict*, 66-67.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 67.

³⁷ Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 2.

³⁸ The Venezuelan electoral system is a mixed-member proportional system. Voting is not mandatory. Over the past century, voter turnout has been high; from 1963 to 1988 the percentage has remained between 70-85%. During the political crisis of the late 1980s and into the 1990s, people appear to have become disillusioned with the political system in general and voting numbers dropped. From 1993-2000, voter turnout hovered around 55-60%. See International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "Voter Turnout: Venezuela" www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=VE and Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Venezuela: Historical Archive of Parliamentary Election Results" www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2347_arc.htm. Results of the 1998-2006 elections and referendum are available on the website of the National Electoral Council of Venezuela. <http://www.cne.gov.ve/> Their figures show a rise from a voting percentage of 56% in 1998 and 2000 to 70% in 2004 (referendum) and 75% in 2006. (These figures are consistent with other sources; like European Commission External Relations, "The EU's Relationship with Venezuela"

http://www.ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/venezuela/intro/index.htm) The rise in voter turnout is significant, especially in the face of the opposition's campaign, though last minute and half-hearted, for abstention in the election.

CHAPTER TWO: CHÁVEZ: AN EXAMPLE OF LATIN AMERICAN POPULISM?

Chávez has frequently been labeled a populist, a label that has often carried negative connotations, suggesting unrealistic economic policies and a demagogic appeal to the masses. This assertion requires some attention, given the imprecise nature of the term. This chapter explores both the history and meaning of populism. It argues that the term has been inappropriately cast in a negative light and that once shed of its inappropriately negative connotations it is reasonable to consider Chávez a populist. Considering him in relation to other Latin American populist leaders helps us better understand his rule and his style.

Populism is a political phenomenon that arose in the early twentieth century. The term has come to be used regularly, and loosely, to describe any political figure that fits such vague criteria as having strong charisma and a large lower-class following. A leader who is simply popular is sometimes deemed “populist.” It is no wonder, then, that scholars have called for a moratorium on the use of the word.¹ However, the utility of this concept is not expended. Throughout history, certain politicians have stood out from the rest as outstanding leaders with exemplary personal appeal that crosses a broad spectrum of society, bringing promises of dramatic change. These populists have had a significant impact on politics, which would be foolish to ignore.

Part of the confused understanding of populism is due to its problematic heritage. A veil of negativity shrouds public perception of populist leaders. Two main issues account for this: their autocratic tendency and their poor economic record.

The style of government used by populists tends to be highly centralized. Because populist leaders rely so heavily on sustained allegiance from their followers, they often bypass formal legal procedures in order to rule in a way that pleases their support base. Though “the people” are often called upon to support their leader through rallies or elections, in practice, populism often ends up resembling an authoritarian dictatorship state, as political parties and institutions are weakened or totally dissolved. In practice, the relationship between democracy and populism, is at best, strained. In fact, political scientist Kirk Hawkins argues that populist attributes are inherently anti-democratic. He

says, “It is difficult and perhaps impossible to build democracy on the foundation of populism.”²

The second problem regarding populism’s unfavourable reputation is the failed economic record of historic populist leaders. Despite numerous experiments, populist economics, characterized by government control of industry and a focus on redistribution of income, appear to be unsustainable in the long term. Scholars Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards call this “the self-destructive feature of populism” because the circularity of populist macroeconomic policies, they argue, has repeatedly led to inflation, crisis, and collapse of the economic system.³ The assertion that populist economics are fiscally irresponsible is so accepted that few now dare to travel that road. Several recent leaders have risen to power with populist appeals, only to quickly abandon the economic policies that go hand-in-hand. These about-face changes not only reinforce the belief that economic populism can not succeed, but also contribute to skepticism of the sincerity of populist leaders, whose charisma and showy rhetoric are already suspect.

Historians and political scientists continue to strive for a definition of populism. Populism has been examined in a variety of ways. Michael Conniff argues that populism is primarily political, with the most important characteristics being “urban, multiclass, electoral, expansive, ‘popular’, and led by charismatic figures.”⁴ Carlos de la Torre asserts that populism is most importantly a social relationship, based on the social construction of a leader.⁵ Kenneth Roberts lists four different perspectives: historical/sociological, economic, ideological, and political.⁶ These various foci speak to the tension over which elements are crucial to the nature of this phenomenon. The main issue in the current debate is whether economic policy should factor into this equation. Given the great disparity in academic understanding, how can we rescue populism from its present state of confusion?

I understand populism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Several distinct characteristics are consistently present in Latin American figures deemed populist, which help us understand this phenomenon in a meaningful way. Their style of leadership and public interaction is unique, and has fostered a reciprocal relationship between leader and followers different from other political leaders. Nonetheless, economic policies cannot be ignored, and inevitably play a decisive role in defining a leader and his legacy. One’s

approach to economics affects other aspects of governance, and indeed, is greatly relevant in the everyday lives of the nation's people. However, we should not overstate its importance as a defining characteristic of populism. After all, a leader can pursue populist-style economics without being a populist. I agree with Francisco Panizza who stated that defining populism as strictly an economic program greatly reduces it to a narrow view, a "statist, inward-looking post-war model of development."⁷ Instead, as a political representation, populism is much more flexible and able to address the differing temporal and regional experiences of its cases.

There are those, however, that choose to disregard economics altogether. As a result, the new categories of "classical populism" and "neopopulism" were created. This view does not hold much weight, in my opinion, as the distinction lies heavily on the idea that neopopulism is essentially political populism without economic follow-through. Later in this chapter, I will discuss this debate in more detail, and give some examples of how the case of Chávez in particular discredits that argument.

Even having narrowed down our definition as requiring a specific economic component, open debate still remains about the structural elements of populism. What qualities are essential to constitute a populist label? While some have favored a very open-ended framework, I opt for a more specific list of criteria to help us classify this type of leadership. However, I concede, like Kenneth Roberts, that not every element needs to be present in every case.⁸ A multi-dimensional notion of populism can help us better understand the different experiences within this tradition.

Perhaps the best way to understand this phenomenon is by examining the history of populism. Latin America has been influenced by populism more than any other region. It seems embedded in the political consciousness of the people who repeatedly are 'seduced' (to use the words of de la Torre) by such leaders throughout the twentieth century.⁹ To illustrate the common elements I will draw comparisons from the most renowned cases of populism, as well as a more recent, contentious one. The historical figures that will be discussed are Getúlio Vargas of Brazil (1930-45, 1951-54), José María Velasco Ibarra of Ecuador (1934-35, 1944-47, 1952-56, 1960-61, 1968-72), Juan Domingo Perón of Argentina (1946-55, 1973-74), and Fidel Castro of Cuba (1959-present.) Through these cases, several characteristics are evident:

- (1) Charismatic, personalist style of leadership, often with paternalistic or messianic elements
- (2) Heterogeneous, multi-class following, frequently mobilized in support of one leader
- (3) Ambiguous ideology, with an “Us vs. Them” component, specifically, the lower classes against the elite.
- (4) Top-down style of governance that tends to be strongly presidentialist and centralized with low levels of institutionalization
- (5) Economic policies focused on redistribution of wealth and state control (or partial control) over industry

Charisma is undoubtedly important for populists. One example of a populist with exceptional charisma and the remarkable ability to rally support whenever necessary was Ecuador’s José Velasco Ibarra. His famous claim, “Give me a balcony and I will make myself president” rings true, given his outstanding record; Velasco won five presidential elections, running under various partisan banners.¹⁰ (Interestingly enough, he failed to complete a single full term, a common fate of populists.) Fidel Castro is well known for his charisma and the ability to captivate an audience for hours with his natural, poetic, and impassioned speech.

Populist leaders often exhibit a strong degree of religiosity in their image as leader. Not only do they use religious language to support their cause but their followers often believe they are granted divine appointment. Velasco Ibarra was seen as “Gran Ausente” (the Great Absentee) in contrast to the Liberals who incarnated sin, according to the social perception, and were therefore the reason for the country’s ills.¹¹ Fidel Castro is often perceived by his supporters as the messiah and divine leader of the Cuban struggle. The crowning moment of his divine blessing, in the eyes of the people, came during a public address shortly after the Revolution’s victory; as Castro spoke to a large and optimistic crowd, two doves descended and perched on his shoulder, and from then

on his authority as leader was sealed.¹² In fact, this messianic quality strongly aligns with the presence of charisma in leadership style. Originally, “charisma” referred specifically to a divine acknowledgement or appointment bestowed on a person, though the term has now been secularized.¹³

Paternalism is also seen in several cases: Juan Perón’s followers believed in their leader’s genuine care for their well-being, which was displayed early on through his visits to factories as the Minister of Labor. Getúlio Vargas was fondly called “o Velho” (the old man) and the “boapraca” (the good fellow) for his amiability and the idea that “everything under his control would turn up right.”¹⁴

Another similarity of populist leaders is that they receive support for a multi-class following. The working classes typically comprise the majority of populist supporters, however, other sectors of society have offered support. Castro maintains control of the Cuban armed forces, aided by his brother Raul Castro as Minister of Defense and the fresh memory of events such as the Bay of Pigs, the Missile Crisis, and several international missions. Perón was a former military commander who had a somewhat precarious allegiance from the military.¹⁵ Perón also played upon bourgeoisie fears of communism to incorporate some middle class support, portraying himself as the moderate who could appease both sides.¹⁶

The populists’ supporters are often called upon to demonstrate their allegiance through mass mobilization, rather than simply during election time. This characteristic is prominent in all cases. “Los descamisados” (the shirtless ones) gathered in great numbers to listen to Perón’s powerful balcony speeches to his followers, as well as in protest over his brief imprisonment in 1943. These “carnivelesque” rallies were legendary, with songs, cheers and drums, and commemorations are still celebrated to this day in Argentina.¹⁷ Vargas tried to unite the working class in Brazil, where “trabalhadores” (labourers) and “opérios” (workers) were considered distinct (because of different educational background). 1945, the year of Vargas’ election, was a year of political awakening for the urban-industrial sectors, which had just recently been enfranchised. Most backed Vargas in the “queremos” (for “Queremos Getúlio” – We want Getúlio”) campaign, which came alive in the streets of Brazil’s cities.¹⁸ Velasco’s 1939 and 1944 presidential campaign relied heavily on messianism; his dramatized

returns from exile were festive processions, like the Redeemer coming to save the country.¹⁹ In Cuba, public gatherings and addresses are also quite normal, although they have lessened in recent years due to Castro's age and health.

Thirdly, populists tend to have a vague ideology. The emphasis is on immediate and sustained popular support and thus an ambiguous platform is advantageous as to avoid alienating potential allies with specific ideological or tactical details. As Michael Conniff points out, a common label for populist programs is often simply attaching "ismo" to the name of the leader: Perónismo, Getulismo, Adhemarismo, Velasquismo, Guitanismo, etc.²⁰ Perón also famously used "the third way", along with "Justicialismo", to describe his ambiguous ideology.²¹ Velasco's agenda was also vague and inconsistent. In the 1944 elections, his victory speech suggests how he was able to bring together conservative, communist, and excluded liberals in his ADE coalition: "I don't serve any determined ideology. I don't serve any determined party. I will be the Head of the State. I will be the servant of the people, the servant of Ecuador in search of nationality, of morality,..."²² Indeed a map displaying populist leaders throughout history would show a wide range of perspectives across the left and right, with some figures difficult to place. Even Castro, although he has always maintained his socialist identity, has shifted aspects of his ideology significantly over his forty-seven year rule.²³

Nonetheless, within the amorphous ideology of populist politics is a common reverence for "el pueblo." Populists often uphold the romanticized image of the people as righteous and faultless. Defining "el pueblo" typically results in the creation of an enemy. Some academics, such as de la Torre and Weyland, highlight a Manichean discourse that is present in populist rhetoric.²⁴ This discourse portrays the situation in black and white terms— and in particular, a struggle between good and evil. In the 1944 Ecuadorian elections Velasco defined "el pueblo" in political and moral-transcendental terms, linking them to heroism and patriotism, in contrast to "el oligarquía," who had no conscience or interest in the common good.²⁵ Castro frequently talks about the well-being of the people. He often preaches against the threat of imperialism, the United States, the Cuban traitors (dissenters), and others who seek to destroy their sovereignty and way of life.

For obvious reasons, it becomes particularly advantageous for a populist to be seen as one of the people. In doing so, the populist is also able to present himself as a political outsider, who can rightly criticize the establishment.²⁶ Vargas was able to recreate his image for his second presidential run by painting himself as a laid-back cowboy who drank traditional yerbe mate tea on his ranch, only to reluctantly return to politics at the behest of his supporters.²⁷

The idea that “the people know best” leads to the profession of democracy while often ignoring its institutionalized practice, revealing one of the reasons for the main criticism of the populist tradition. Upholding this ideal serves to legitimate the populist’s actions. Because the supporters stand by their leader, and are often active in the decision-making process itself, his actions are therefore justified in any situation. The infallible nature of “the people”, in turn, creates an “anything goes” attitude which can be used negatively, like for example, in violating minority rights in favour of the majority.²⁸ According to De la Torre, in defense of undemocratic actions, Velasco believed that “...he, the leader, the national embodiment, was certainly above ‘bad’ Constitutions, ‘corrupt’ politicians, and ‘ignorant or misled’ citizens whose antagonistic opinions had to be silenced.”²⁹ Kirk Hawkins argues that this democratic discourse, focusing on the popular will, is always present in populist cases.³⁰

A top-down style of governance and low levels of institutionalization unite populist leaders of old and new. Populists usually take steps to secure their position, building power around them, while systematically breaking down political institutions that would restrict their power. Kenneth Roberts states that populists commonly employ deinstitutionalization and “the politics of antipolitics.”³¹ It is argued that because Perón’s party-union linkages were so weak, built upon informal agreements and tradition, it was easily dismantled during the “neoliberal age” of the 1980s and 90s, which in turn allowed Menem to broaden his class appeal, outside of the diminishing status of organized workers.³² Castro totally dismantled the power structures of the U.S. puppet government of Cuba when his 1959 Revolution succeeded. In this case, he did institutionalize a totally new system. Constitutional reform is also a common way to shift the balance of power between the president and legislature.³³ For these reasons, populism often has an ambiguous relationship with democracy.

As I have shown, political populism has several characteristics that have persisted throughout the twentieth century. The remaining characteristic concerns economic practice. Further analysis of historic cases of populism continues to support the affirmation of a resurgence of populism in the 1990s to present, despite some scholars' claims that "populism is dead."³⁴ Given different circumstances and time, many new leaders have dismissed the old developmentalist (or "structuralist") economic model and adopted the economics of neoliberalism. This change has prompted renewed discussion over what characteristics are tantamount to the definition of populism. Academics who consider economic policy a determining factor, like myself, disagree with the assertion by some scholars that recent neoliberal leaders like Peru's Alberto Fujimori and Argentina's Carlos Menem can be rightly classified as populist, alongside those classic examples of the earlier age like Perón, Vargas, and Velasco.

Economics, then, becomes quite significant in reaching any measure of consensus about the nature of Populism. The tension between the political and economical emphasis in the populist definition has led to a proposed compromise by differentiating between the new and old variants of the phenomenon. The construction of the categories of "classical populism" and "neopopulism" has been used to distinguish the two types throughout Latin America. In these classifications, the basic tenets of populism hold true—like David Leaman's basic criteria of a multi-class following led by a leader possessing personalistic style and rhetoric³⁵—but the boundaries are not restricted solely to the political realm. It is more than simply a matter of when these leaders arose, but how they chose to deal with the political and economic conditions of their countries. Nonetheless, the debate is on-going.

Traditionally, populists practiced the model of import substitution industrialization (ISI) and state intervention. Early twentieth century populists favored economic policies of redistribution, increased social spending, and national development, principles frequently overlapping with socialism. Because of their overall rejection of market-oriented reform, many economists view populists as "fiscally irresponsible" who used frivolous spending to acquire public support. These kinds of economic preferences, held by populists of the 1930s and 40s, contrast sharply with conventional wisdom of today.

Neoliberalism, in recent years, was hailed as the only means to pull Latin America, and other underdeveloped nations, out of economic stagnation and poverty. Many scholars argue that political populism and economic liberalism cannot co-exist. Because political populism depends on the active support of a heterogeneous group of supporters, the populist leader needs to appease them in concrete ways, i.e. via wealth redistribution through social programs, and favorable policies, like protectionism, subsidies, and entrepreneurial incentives. The neoliberal model flies in the face of the old developmentalist economics favored by the classic populists of the 1930s and 40s. Neoliberalism welcomes foreign investors and ownership of industry. It advocates minimal involvement of the state in economic matters, upholding an extreme adherence to the “laissez faire, laissez passer” capitalist ideology. Government spending is reduced, and inherited debt often requires governments to adopt structural adjustment programs advocated by international financial institutions like the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank.³⁶ Essentially, the state disappears from the economic and fiscal stage, losing most of its influence over economic and fiscal policy-making.

Certainly these changes create a major dilemma for a populist leader, who typically increases his powers in all arenas. Neoliberalism effectively ties the hands of the president, relieving him of many important responsibilities and opportunities. How, then, do some argue for the populist status of leaders like Fujimori, Menem, and others who have adopted the economics of neoliberalism?

These so-called “neopopulists” clearly exhibit certain populist qualities. I will focus on Menem and Fujimori, who most often receive this label. Though neither was known for their charisma, they were both admired for different aspects of their memorable personal style.³⁷ Both took steps to deinstitutionalize existing political structures and ruled in a centralized, presidentialist manner.³⁸ They received political endorsement from a multi-class grouping and developed a discourse that categorized “us and them.” Their ideology and political agenda were vague in their respective electoral campaigns.

Fujimori and Menem both rose to power on a populist campaign with professed intentions to implement developmentalist-style economic policies. Menem ran with the Perónist Party, which held tightly to the lasting impact of Juan Perón on the populace.

However, once in power in 1989, he abandoned Perónist economic values. Fujimori was elected in 1990 in Peru, a country where the populist tradition is also very strong. He ran against the incumbent populist Alain Garcia and neoliberal author Mario Vargas Llosa, and then shocked everyone by making an about-face change from his campaign promises to adopt a stabilization program that was even tougher than that advocated by his neo-liberal opponent.³⁹

Is this simply a case of “bait and switch” tactics, a term used by historian Paul Drake to describe leaders who used populist-style politics to get elected, only to return to “normal” methods of governance?⁴⁰ The answer depends on one’s criteria for an accurate assessment of Populism. Many scholars, like historian Jorge Basurto, find neoliberal economics and political populism to be “antithetical to each other”⁴¹, and therefore a leader pursuing such policies is not a true populist. A primarily political definition, however, endorses such cases. Proponents of this view suggest that Menem and Fujimori cast doubt on the supposed incompatibility of political populism and economic liberalism. Kenneth Roberts (1996) and Kurt Weyland (1999) argue that political populism and economic liberalism are, in fact, compatible. According to Roberts, autocratic neoliberalism may in fact *embody* the core political and sociological elements of populism.⁴²

One argument for the credibility of neopopulism is that both populists and neoliberalism are used as a remedy, an apparent solution, to a country’s economic or political stagnation. Populists typically gain popularity because they are able to convince their supporters that they can deliver them from the present chaos – that is why a crisis situation is the most conducive for the rise of populism. Weyland argues that “prepackaged neoliberal programs are ready-made recipes to combat the economic crisis and show off their ‘extraordinary’ abilities to ‘save’ the country.”⁴³ For example, Menem promised a “salariazó” (huge wage increase) and a “productive revolution” (through no specified means) and the initial economic improvements achieved by his neoliberal package, he argued, did just that. In this way, he defended his policies, suggesting that it was not a “great turnaround” (in policy promises) as critics had charged.⁴⁴ Also, it is argued that neoliberalism does not necessarily mean an end to social responsibility. Neopopulists, and neoliberal economists, may still use

redistributive principles. Fujimori used spending in this way. In the 1996 federal budget, 40% of the total government budget was directed to social spending, all of which was directed through the ministry of the president, not traditional ministries.⁴⁵

I disagree. It is not possible to separate the political and economic realm so dramatically. To speak the language of populism, appeal to the typical populist support-base, and to rule in the said “populist” fashion, rightly demands economic policies that affirm the political position taken. A leader must “practice what he/she preaches”; economic policies must be a noteworthy factor in the populist definition. Much more can be said on this debate, but that is not the purpose of this project. Nevertheless, an understanding of the neopopulism argument is important in correctly classifying Chávez.

Chávez presents a strong case for the viability of populism in the twenty-first century. In many ways, he fills the criteria spectacularly. First, anyone who has seen video footage of Chávez can immediately sense the charismatic and personalistic element of his political image. Chávez is, simply put, a “fun guy.” He loves to laugh, joke, and sing. He interacts with his supporters, as well as with other international leaders, in a personal, intimate way – hugging, cheering, and joking with them. His supporters tell of their admiration of him as a brother and a neighbour, as one of their own.

Chávez’s image is also paternalistic in nature, with him as leader acting on behalf of ‘his people.’ Not only does Chávez seem to genuinely care about the people and take the time to interact with them, but he also attempts to address their needs in tangible ways. This paternalistic, and even messianic element is clear in the faith of the people who appeal to Chávez as the answer to their problems. Venezuelans call in to Chávez’s “Aló Presidente” program with concerns quite far from the realm of politics. One lucid example is a man who spoke of the problems caused by his broken bicycle, to which Chávez sympathized and instructed the caller where to take his bicycle for a free repair.⁴⁶ This is a common occurrence; Chávez regularly meets with his supporters, listens to their problems, and promises (and often time, delivers) a solution. As well, frequent religious language and metaphors in his speech contribute to his messianic image. The assertion that “God is on our side” further cements the approval of his loyal supporters. The religiosity of Chávez’s discourse is significant, like many populists of the past.

Where Perón, Vargas, and Ibarra used balconies and podiums to address the people, Chávez, though not abandoning these fora, can now easily reach a broader audience through the technology of television broadcasting. Television is an ideal medium because it conveys more personality and charisma than radio or print. As Silvio Waisbord, a professor of journalism, points out, “Personalism” works well with “media logic,” because it prioritizes and focuses on individuals, rather than ideas.⁴⁷ The key elements of Chávez’s style, his radicalism, personable casual appeal, and use of history in rhetoric, are all favourably exhibited through this medium. To be sure, Chávez’s intimate relation with the public is, in part, due to many hours of media broadcasting. From his live interactive “Aló Presidente” to the frequent televised public addresses, Chávez uses the media heavily in connecting with the Venezuelan people. Waisbord argues that an unintelligent media is best suited to a populist’s success. In “Media Populism: Neopopulism in Latin America,” he says, “By definition, [the media in Latin America] bows to popular tastes and rejects elitist culture outright. Programming telenovels throughout the day, Latin American television continually celebrates popular sensibilities, language, and miseries. With its steady diet of talk shows, tabloid news, and variety shows that feature ‘everyman’ and ‘everywoman’, television is the ultimate populist medium.”⁴⁸ There is truth to this statement in regard to the content of modern programming in Latin American countries. Presently, the Latin American media is characterized by light programming, filled with soap operas, games shows, and celebrity profiles. However, my objection to Waisbord’s statement is with the underlying presumption that “the people” targeted by populist leaders are ignorant and exploited people, who absent-mindedly consume all popular culture without desiring anything more substantial. This view reflects yet another negative belief about populism - that the populist following are mesmerized and deceived by the charismatic persuasive leader. This contention not only undermines the intelligence of millions who have supported populists throughout history, but is also quite simply untrue. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, the content of Chávez’s message, whether exported through the media or other methods, is contrary to the ‘mindless’, unstimulating substance of today’s media.

Secondly, populism typically generates a heterogeneous, multi-class political coalition. Historically, the workers have made up the bulk of support for populist leaders. In recent cases, like Castro and Chávez, the support-base has changed. Chávez's support is concentrated in the low levels of society. Throughout his presidency, Chávez has seen a rise and fall in his support among the other classes. While the classical examples of Perón and Vargas reaped support among the working class, Chávez has not aligned with the working class and labour unions. In fact, the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV) and Chávez have had a combative relationship from the beginning. Several policies enacted by Chávez have contributed to this, as well as CTV's traditional ties to the Democratic Action (AD), Chávez's main political opposition.⁴⁹

This difference in class appeal can also be explained by the changing nature of society. The globalized market economy, dominated by big businesses and multinational companies, has led many more people to enter the informal economic sector; those 'unorganized' informal workers are often much more numerous than the organized working class.⁵⁰ The informal sector now accounts for nearly 50% of urban employment in Latin America.⁵¹ Chávez has sought to incorporate these atomized groups, the very poor and the indigenous, into the political fabric of the nation.

Outside of the allegiance of the poor, Chávez also enjoys key support from the military. As a former army colonel, his first inroads in gathering a following were among colleagues who shared his distaste for the Carlos Andrés Pérez government. However, in Andrés Pérez's first years as president, several high-ranking officers, upset by loss of privileges from the regime change, allied with the opposition and helped carry out the April 2002 coup, which temporarily removed him from power. When Chávez returned, he used this insubordination to his benefit and discharged much of the military high command, leaving in place those loyal to him.

As stated earlier, mobilization of supporters is a common characteristic of populism. However, today, public life has changed from the so-called 'heyday' of classical populism in the 1930s and 40s. Politics are not generally conducted in the public spaces like the streets and plazas anymore, but in official places or in the media.⁵² The routine nature of public mobilization in Venezuela, then, is all the more significant. These gatherings take place at both Chávez's behest and the people's own initiative.

Chavistas have mobilized on many occasions through countless demonstrations in the streets, elections and referendums, and participation in social development programs and military reserve training.

Commentary on Chávez, especially in the early period, was highly speculative in part due to his vague ideological position. Journalists and government officials alike came to varied conclusions about the Venezuelan leader based on his vague rhetoric and ever-changing opinions. Chávez's speech often includes use of grand notions - ideas like revolution and imperialism - which can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, the proclamation of his belief in 'socialism' is frequent; yet in practice, his regime differs from traditional 'socialism'. (For example, private ownership and entrepreneurship is allowed and encouraged, as well as foreign investment, although there are signs this might change in his third term.) Chávez's movement is called "Bolivarian", an imprecise concept, drawing on popular reverence for revolutionary leader, Simón Bolívar. Like other populists, Chávez has also spoken of a "third way", an alternative to the traditional political dichotomy of socialism and conservatism.

His discourse focuses on "el pueblo." "The people" represent, for Chávez, the common people, those who have been underrepresented, ignored, and exploited. The adversary, then, is the elite and the political establishment, virtually one in the same in Venezuela due to decades of backroom dealing and corruption. The term used most often by Chávez is "the oligarchy," also common to the populist experience in history. In this globalized age, the enemy also includes foreign powers in the business and political world. The "imperialists" play a very important role in Chávez's politics because of his strong objection to neoliberalism and capitalism.

In the 1998 elections, Chávez effectively portrayed himself as a political outsider and candidate against the establishment. Chávez often points to his Indigenous and African heritage as added legitimacy to his claim of likeness to the people, and at the same time to distance himself from the "rotten" elite.

Manichean discourse permeates Chávez's politics as well. Chávez certainly presents the issues in antithetical terms, with 'the people' embodying the ultimate good while almost any action taken by the Venezuelan oligarchy or the U.S. government is 'bad' or 'evil.' Chávez has even referred to President G.W. Bush as "Mr. Danger",

“Satan”, and “the devil”. Chávez often incites the people over the dangers of the “hovering predators” who circle, waiting for an opportunity to descend. The threat of these groups, be they the United States, the international financial institutions, or the Venezuelan upper class, is used to unite the people and generate greater support for Chávez’s nationalistic program.

One of the most frequent criticisms of Chávez is how he has centralized power around himself, leading some to cry authoritarianism and dictatorship. The 2002 coup and the subsequent general strike “legitimized” dismissals and appointments throughout the government, the military, and the national oil company, Pdvsa. Specific legislation has helped Chávez amass power; in late 2001, Chávez bypassed the National Assembly to push through forty-nine “enabling laws.” Additionally, critics have pointed to changes in the Supreme Court as further damaging democratic structures.

The deinstitutionalization of formal political structures is also present in Chávez’s case. The failure of the Venezuelan political system opened the doors for sweeping reform. Many structures of the old parliamentary system, which was dominated by two highly entrenched political parties, were dismantled by Chávez and his newly formed MVR. The Movimiento Quinto Republica (Fifth Republic Movement) remains a loose coalition of several small parties⁵³ who have come together around the charismatic leadership and vision of Chávez.⁵⁴ The degree of personalism in the party structure is obvious. As Kirk Hawkins points out, the fact that supporters and opponents use the term “Chavistas” or “antiChavistas” rather than “Emeverrista” (based on the party name, MVR) demonstrates the focus on the leader rather than the party.⁵⁵ Every electoral campaign focuses on the personage of Chávez, with his picture plastered on everything as endorsement for party candidates.

The new Venezuelan constitution of 1999 reinforced the power of the Executive (for example, it allows the president to dissolve the National Assembly upon presidential decree) and extended the length of the presidential term from four to six years, which further contributed to “a state of hyperpresidentialism.” It also reversed changes made by previous leaders to decentralize power.⁵⁶ A presidentialist system, like that under Chávez, argues Kurt Weyland, is much more conducive to populist leadership, as opposed to a parliamentary system.⁵⁷

Roberts argues that populist figures that do not pose a major threat to the elite, (which are few, if you reject the neopopulist distinction) especially in terms of economic reform, do not need to build extensive organizations. Chávez, however, has formidable adversaries, and thus requires a political counterweight to the entrenched structures of the political system.⁵⁸ Therefore, Chávez has sought alternative ways to access political support. Instead of strengthening or institutionalizing his party,⁵⁹ Chávez focused on structural changes to the political system. The MVR remained “in a permanent state of electoral mobilization” according to Roberts,⁶⁰ because of the many elections and referendums conducted. These actions further weaken traditional methods and institutions while strengthening new organization among Chávez’s allies. As Chávez’s rhetoric and policy increasingly distanced political and economic elites, grass-roots organizations were developed. In 2000, the “Bolivarian Circles” were created.⁶¹ Existing at all levels, municipal, regional, and national, these Circles are very important in educating the public, delivering social services, and mobilizing political action. Instead of bringing these groups into the national political network, they remain separate and independent of the MVR party.⁶² Many other community groups have surfaced, with and without the persuasion of Chávez. Land councils, called the Urban Land Committees (CTUs), are one such organization, which assist families in securing legal titles for property in the barrios.

The argument that Chávez is a return to classical populism is especially strong when considering the economic policies taken by his Bolivarian government. While the new string of ‘neopopulists’ have consistently adopted neoliberalism as their economic program of choice, Chávez has adamantly rejected it.

At the beginning, Chávez acted prudently in fiscal matters, taking steps to regain economic sovereignty of key industries, but mostly concerning himself with political issues, like the rewriting of the Constitution, as well as disaster relief in Vargas after massive flooding and mudslides. In a 2005 interview, Chávez told Aleida Guevara March that, “in the first two years, we were on the defensive.”⁶³ Chávez’s caution comes through in this early postulation about his economic agenda; former head of the Central Bank, Ruth de Krivoy, told the *Wall Street Journal* that Chávez’s economic policies “do not reflect a total commitment to market-oriented policies or a complete rejection.”⁶⁴

Over the years, however, Chávez's economic policies have taken a dramatic turn to a more radical posture, rejecting neoliberalism, which in the eyes of many economists is considered the only model for any measure of economic success. Undoubtedly the lessons learned by previous experiments under the governments of Carlos Andrés Pérez, and Rafael Caldera, influenced Chávez's economic beliefs. Economic policies implemented under Chávez, with the stated aim of helping the poor and underrepresented, resemble classical populism, with the focus on state intervention and the development of industry and social programs.

Dramatic increases in oil revenue helped Chávez pay for a more interventionist position. Venezuela's oil sector contributes 25% of the total GDP and, therefore, the country's economic stability is highly dependent on its operation.⁶⁵ The oil company, Pdvsa (Petroleos de Venezuela) was brought under federal ownership in 1976 under President Carlos Andrés Pérez but successive governments relinquished much of this control. Andrés Pérez's opening up of the industry ("the apertura") in his second presidency (1989-93) essentially reversed his earlier decision to nationalize Pdvsa, and opened it up to foreign investors and reduced taxation as an added incentive. However even before this, Pdvsa had become a "state within a state", virtually autonomous and unaccountable to the government.⁶⁶ Under Chávez, Venezuela regained the majority of shares in the company.⁶⁷ Chávez has also increased the amount of royalties paid by international partners and is partially credited for increasing the price of oil because of his leadership role in restoring the power of OPEC.⁶⁸ Particularly after the April coup and the subsequent strike and lockout, which lasted three months (December to February) and devastated the Venezuelan economy, dramatic restructuring of Pdvsa's executive has given Chávez extensive power over Venezuela's most valuable resource. Other natural resources have been nationalized, such as the mining industry, and several agro-industrial businesses (supplying state products like milk and maize flour.)⁶⁹ These resources, but principally oil, have truly been the source of Chávez's empowerment, allowing the creation of many redistributive and social equity programs. The Constitution states that, "any revenues generated by exploiting underground wealth and minerals shall be used to finance real productive investment, education, and health." This provision prevents oil profits from going to enterprises outside the country, as it had in the past.⁷⁰

The redistributive objective is seen in the many social programs initiated by Chávez's government. The health care system has undergone tremendous expansion, bringing needed services to remote locations and poor areas. Free education has been made widely available throughout the country, for all levels and ages. Mission Mercal, which continues to grow, offers discounted goods at its retail-food chain stores. Besides the humanitarian focus, the government argues that these investments in health, and other social areas, will have a direct positive effect on the economy.⁷¹

The new Constitution also expresses the classically populist trait to assist the public in their financial and economic well-being. Article 313 states; "the taxation system shall seek a fair distribution of public burdens in accordance with the taxpayer's ability to pay, taking into account the principle of progressive taxation, as well as protection of the national economy and raising the standard of living of the population..."⁷²

In the business sector, small and diverse forms of entrepreneurship have been promoted. "Social production companies" have been created alongside traditional capitalist forms. These new companies, now an estimated 67,000, are based around "cooperatives."⁷³ According to the official government site, "The Cooperative, as opposed to the anonymous companies, is a company of people, not of capitals... [that] promotes democratic management and elimination of capitalist benefit".⁷⁴ Companies, run under "worker's co-management schemes", allow the community to be involved in decision-making. As well, Venezuelan craft and folk industries have been encouraged with the legalization of the informal sector. According to Chávez, the people have the right to their livelihood – whether it be in official stores or in the markets on the street.⁷⁵

Monetary policies have been implemented to combat the state of economic crisis that Chávez inherited. In February 2003, Venezuela switched from a floating exchange rate to a fixed one, in reaction to threats of capital flight and drastic devaluation of the bolívar due to a banking crisis and general economic depression (further aggravated by the 2002 strike.)⁷⁶

By spurning the pressures of international financial institutions and powerful first world countries, Chávez has presented a clear alternative to the powerful paradigm of neoliberal capitalism. Chávez has set out to prove that this is a viable option, and one not

solely for countries blessed with the luxury of large oil reserves. Venezuela's example, coupled with the promotion of regional cooperation and integration, has encouraged others to question the supposed superiority of free-market economics. What remains to be seen is whether Chávez's model, like that of populists from the earlier period, is sustainable. Chávez must prove that this macroeconomic redistributive model does not continue the pattern of Latin America's economic history, in which the populist experience ends in economic collapse.

Presently, other leaders who resemble Chávez are gaining ground. Populism seems to be experiencing a revival. Evo Morales, though in the very early period of his presidency, can be said to have populist qualities. His rhetoric and policies closely resemble his friend and ally, Chávez. He purports to represent "the people", mostly the Indigenous, in Bolivia, and defend them against foreign exploitation in the form of privatization and foreign domination of their natural gas reserves. He also pledges to protect coca farming. Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva has been called populist. The classification carried more weight early in Lula's career, as he campaigned across the country in peasant clothing, exhibiting a down-to-earth appeal, and criticizing the inefficiency and corruption of Brazil's political elite. However, Lula worked quite closely and cooperatively with the political elite through existing institutions, and has, for the most part, discarded populist discourse. Leaders like Lula and Morales possess populist attributes, just as Menem and Fujimori, but should not be promptly labeled populists without further examination.

The fluidity of the populist concept, though at times frustrating, is perhaps one of its strengths. The need to neatly fit any historical figure or a political movement into an ordered and familiar box is somewhat unrealistic, and in a sense devalues their heritage. Carlos de la Torre remarks, "Maybe because of their ambiguities, these notions allow social scientists to research these phenomena in all of their complexities. Populism, old and new, has resisted efforts to find clearer models that in their effort to be parsimonious leave out immeasurable elements of politics such as identities, discourses, and the meaning of these experiences for actors."⁷⁷ Therefore, I too, accept the vague notions of populism. Chávez is a complex figure, one that represents both great optimism for the future, and fosters great suspicion. Thus, understanding Chávez and contemporary

Venezuelan politics requires careful consideration. Nonetheless, in both political style and economic policies, Chávez aligns strongly with the key elements of the populist definition, and represents a remarkable revival of what many scholars said to be “dead.” In speech and practice, he has revolutionized contemporary Latin American politics under the historic banner of populism.

I will conclude with Chávez’s opinion on the subject. Being painted with the populist brush carries certain negative connotations, like economic irresponsibility, autocratic rule, and political manipulation of the “blind” masses, so it is no surprise that Chávez would reject the populist label. In a 2004 interview with Marta Harnecker, Chávez says “... our attitude is not that of those governments that went to a town with a bag of bills, giving away money, or walking around with a bag of food – that, yes, was populism. I am against that... [Our support] is a result of direct contact with the people, who, as you have seen, do not remain only to receive handouts.”⁷⁸ Despite the negative implications of this label, the example of Chávez is proof that populism, in its classical and ‘true’ form, is alive and well in Latin America in the 21st century.

¹ Michael Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 13. Conniff addresses the claim that populism is dead. For more discussion on the current state of populism, see various contributors in Michael Conniff ed. *Latin American Populism in a Comparative Perspective*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) and the special edition on populism in the *Bulletin of Latin American Research* vol.19, no.2 (April 2000)

² Kirk Hawkins, “Populism in Venezuela: the Rise of Chavismo” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no.6 (2003), 1145.

³ Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards, *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 7.

⁴ Michael Conniff, *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 13.

⁵ Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: the Ecuadorian Experience*, (The Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 2000), 140.

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- ⁶ Kenneth M. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case" *World Politics* vol.48, no.1 (1996), 84.
- ⁷ Francisco Panizza, "Neopopulism and its limits in Collor's Brazil" *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol.19, no.2 (April 2000), 178.
- ⁸ Kurt Weyland. "Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe" *Comparative Politics* vol.31, no.4 (July 1999), 380.
- ⁹ Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: the Ecuadorian Experience*.
- ¹⁰ Ximena Sosa-Buchholz, "The Strange Center of Populism in Ecuador" in *Populism in Latin America*, ed. Michael Conniff, 140-147.
- ¹¹ Carlos de la Torre. "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa': The Social Production of a Populist Leader in Ecuador in the 1940s" *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol.26, no.3 (October 1994), 695-70.
- ¹² This is a story known to most in Cuba. Posters of this image are easily found on the streets and in tourist shops. Christians likely recognize the significance of this image from the biblical story of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Additionally, in *Caribbean Charisma*, Brian Meeks discusses the many layers of symbolism in this event, especially in the eyes of Santería believers. Brian Meeks, "Cuba's Fidel Castro" in *Caribbean Charisma: Reflections on Leadership, Legitimacy, and Populist Politics*. ed. Anton Allahaar. (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 2001), 223-4
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 213-4.
- ¹⁴ Doris Fagundes Haussen, "Radio and Populism in Brazil: The 1930s and 1940s" *Television & New Media* vol.6, no.3 (August 2005), 258.
- ¹⁵ Perón held key executive positions in the military government that took power in 1943: Secretary of Labour and Social Welfare, Minister of War, and later vice-president. Other officers worried about the amount of power Perón had amassed. In 1945, Perón was briefly imprisoned after (another) military coup, but was released because of mass demonstrations by his supporters. He won the presidential election of 1946.
- ¹⁶ Lars Schoultz, *The Populist Challenge: Argentinean Electoral Behaviour in the Postwar Era*. (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 35-40. 1/8th to 1/6th of the Argentinean middle class supported Perónism.
- ¹⁷ One event in particular, on October 17, 1945, was of special importance. In "Populism and Its Legacies in Argentina" in *Populism in Latin America*, ed. Michael Conniff. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), Joel Horowitz says it became "a founding myth" of Perónism. That day, during a massive rally, the military attempted, but failed, to capture Perón. Loyal Perónists still gather in that historic plaza every October 17th to commemorate the event.
- ¹⁸ John D. French, "Industrial Workers and the Birth of the Populist Republic in Brazil: 1945-46" *Latin American Perspectives* vol.16, no.4 (Fall 1989), 7-12.
- ¹⁹ De la Torre, "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa'", 707.
- ²⁰ Michael Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*. (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 5.
- ²¹ For his part, Perón was very ambiguous about his political leanings; although he is readily considered as fascist, or at least sympathetic to such regimes as Mussolini and even Hitler, he apparently professed international socialism in the late 60s and 70s, and allowed Marxist guerillas to fight for his return to power, only to reject them once back in

the presidency. Frederick C. Turner, "The Cycle of Perónism" in *Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina*. eds. Frederick C. Turner and Jose Enrique Miguens (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 10.

²² De la Torre, "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa'", 706.

²³ Like Chávez, there are plenty of documented speeches and writings by Castro stating his opinion on political ideology and philosophy. Also, changes in policy and structure in Cuba, whether because of principle or pragmatism, point to a softening of hard-line Marxist views.

²⁴ Weyland, 1155. And De la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: the Ecuadorian Experience*.

²⁵ De la Torre, "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa'", 697, 704.

²⁶ Taylor C. Boas, "Television and Neopopulism in Latin America: Media Effects in Brazil and Peru" *Latin American Research Review* vol.40, no.2, (June 2005). And Steve Ellner, "Hugo Chávez y Alberto Fujimori: análisis comparativa de dos variantes de populismo" *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales*, vol.7, no.2, (mayo/agosto 2001), 14.

²⁷ Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*, 48-49.

²⁸ McGuire in Hawkins, 1140. In Venezuela's highly polarized state, violence has often marred political demonstrations and protests. Although Chávez has not condoned any such violence, critics argue that his inflammatory comments incite and encourage his supporters to act out. Journalists and the political elite have been targeted by radical Chavistas, resulting in vandalism, threats, etc.

²⁹ De la Torre, "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa'", 709.

³⁰ Hawkins, 1138.

³¹ Kenneth M. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case", 91.

³² Steve Levitsky, "From Labour Politics to Machine Politics: The Transformation of Party-Union Linkages in Argentine Peronism, 1983-1999" *Latin American Research Review* vol.38, no.3 (Oct.2003)

³³ Weyland, 391.

³⁴ Countless articles in magazines and journals discuss the "return of populism" or question the truth of previous assertions that populism died in the 1950s and 60s.

³⁵ David Leaman, "Changing Faces of Populism in Latin America: Masks, Makeovers, and Enduring Features" *Latin American Research Review* vol.39, no.3 (2004), 13.

³⁶ Dornbusch & Edwards, 7. And George Philip, *Developments in Latin American Political Economy: States, Markets, and Actors*. eds. Julia Buxton and Nicola Phillips, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 45.

³⁷ Fujimori skillfully was able to use his Japanese ethnicity to conjure up the stereotypes of the hardworking and successful immigrant community, as well as the common features shared with the majority of the non-white European-linked elite that governed. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case," 93-4. Menem excelled on 1-on-1 contact with citizens, and although he did not possess great oratory skills, his magnetism and charm came across on his appearances on variety shows where he cracked jokes and danced the tango. Silvio Waisbord speaks to the changing arena where politics is played out: the media. Menem had charisma "in the

mold not of a quintessential populist leader but of one who is appropriate to times of mediated politics and manufactured publicity.” Silvio Waisbord, “Media Populism: Neopopulism in Latin America”, 208.

³⁸ Menem also issues many decrees, packed the Supreme Court, and made himself the center of attention. Horowitz, 42. Fujimori, in his very aggressive antipolitics campaign, also did this. Steve Stein states, “The clearest instance of antipolitical conduct was the *autogolpe*, or ‘self-coup’ in April 1992, when [Fujimori] dissolved Congress and the judiciary, and ruled with quasi-dictatorial powers.” Fujimori’s antipolitical campaign was so successful, he was in fact applauded for it. Steve Stein, “The Paths to Populism in Peru,” in *Populism in Latin America*, 115.

³⁹ Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case,” 95.

⁴⁰ Paul Drake, “Chile’s Populism Reconsidered: 1920s-1990s,” in ed. Michael Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*.

⁴¹ Jorge Basurto in Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*, 95. Francisco Panizza, for example, allows for possible experimentation with neoliberal policies, but believes they are incompatible in the long run. (Presumably then, a true populist would return to structuralist economics.) Panizza, 189-190.

⁴² Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case”, 102.

⁴³ Weyland, 384. Roberts makes the same argument, in “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case”, 90-1.

⁴⁴ Celia Szusterman, “Carlos Saul Menem: Variations on the Theme of Populism” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* vol.19, no.2 (2000), 199.

⁴⁵ John Crabtree and Jim Thomas, *Fujimori’s Peru: The Political Economy*. (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998), 19.

⁴⁶ “The Revolution Will Not be Televised” prod. David Power and The Irish Film Board, dir. Kim Bartley and Donnacha O’Briain, (Dublin: The Irish Film Board, 2003) Accessed as “Inside the Coup” *The Passionate Eye*, CBC, April 13, 2003.

⁴⁷ Waisbord, 206.

⁴⁸ Waisbord, 214.

⁴⁹ One of the more significant events in Chávez’s combative relationship with CTV (the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers) was a law created in 2002 that stated all union elections must be monitored by the state. In April 2003, the National Union of Workers (UNT) was formed, a pro-Chávez labour organization. The UNT has since been growing in membership. Diana Barahona, “Venezuela’s National Workers’ Union” *Venezuelanalysis.com*, October 24, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1583>

⁵⁰ This is considered one of the components of neopopulism - the changed social categories in the present age. Steve Ellner points to this, along with the implementation of neoliberal economics, as the two key factors in differentiating neopopulism and classical populism. Steve Ellner, “Hugo Chávez y Alberto Fujimori: análisis comparativa de dos variantes de populismo”, 13.

⁵¹ Levitsky, 8.

⁵² Waisbord, 207.

⁵³ In the 1998 election, MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), PPT (Fatherland for Everyone), PCV (Communist Party of Venezuela), and five other small parties partnered with the MVR. Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*. (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 139.

⁵⁴ In fact, only in the upcoming December 2006 presidential elections, has Chávez finally attempted to join these different parties under one formal banner.

⁵⁵ Hawkins, 1150.

⁵⁶ Ellner, “Hugo Chávez y Alberto Fujimori: análisis comparativa de dos variantes de populismo”, 22.

⁵⁷ He argues that it is a precursor for populist leadership to arise, but I disagree. Through the dismantling of a political system, the same system (presidentialist) can be created after in order to safeguard the leader’s power and allow for centralized governance. Weyland, 387-397.

⁵⁸ Roberts, “Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* vol.38, no.2 (2006), 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 143. In June 2003 there were some attempts to institutionalize the party.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 142.

⁶¹ Bolivarian Circles were created out of the early Bolivarian Committee, cultivated as Chávez roamed the country to gather political support in the years after his 1994 pardon, prior to the 1998 elections. Ibid, 141.

⁶² Ibid, 141-143.

⁶³ Chávez, interview by Aleida Guevara March, *Chávez, Venezuela, and the New Latin America*. (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 2005), 54.

⁶⁴ Thomas T. Vogel Jr. “Chávez produces a mixed Bag of Plans for the Venezuelan Economy” *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 1999.

⁶⁵ Alfredo Baldini, “Fiscal Policy and Business Cycles in an Oil-Producing Economy: the Case of Venezuela” *International Monetary Fund*, December 2005, p4. Also, 50% of public sector revenues and 80% of Venezuela’s overall exports are derived from the oil sector.

⁶⁶ Bernard Mommer, “Subversive Oil” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict*. eds. Ellner and Hellinger. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003) 133-8.

⁶⁷ By law, the Venezuelan government must now maintain 51% of shares in all oil and gas enterprises.

⁶⁸ Chávez has a reputation as a “price hawk” for pressing adherence to OPEC quotas (especially in Pdvsa, which notoriously disregarded OPEC regulations), giving them the ability to collectively set more favourable prices for oil exports.

⁶⁹ “Cowing the Private Sector” *The Economist*, September 3, 2005, vol.376, no.8442, p35.

⁷⁰ Sheila Collins, “Breaking the Mold? Venezuela’s Defiance of the Neoliberal Agenda” *New Political Science* 27, no.3 (Sept.2005), 386. Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic, Title VI

⁷¹ Francisco Armada, the Minister of Health and Social Development said, “We are convinced that more investment in social rights, in areas of fundamental rights like health and education, will give us more possibility for access to an economic development that

is sustainable.” Terry Gibbs, “Business as Usual: What the Chávez era tells us about democracy under globalization” *Third World Quarterly* vol.27, no.2, (2006), 273.

⁷² Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic, from Collins, 386.

⁷³ “Cowing the Private Sector” *The Economist*, September 3, 2005, vol.376, no.8442, 2pg.

⁷⁴ Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, Ministerio para la Economía Popular, Superintendencia Nacional de Cooperativas. <http://www.sunacoop.gob.ve/index.html>

⁷⁵ Vendors in the street were previously illegal because it harmed legitimate private businesses. Chávez has reversed this policy, allowing poor Venezuelans to sell whatever goods in the street. Critics say this has led to an increase in black-market activity, in counterfeit production of goods and pawning of stolen goods.

⁷⁶ C.P. Pandya and Justin Podur, “The Chávez Government’s Economic Policies” *Venezuelanalysis.com*, January 22, 2004.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1092>

⁷⁷ Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: the Ecuadorian Experience*, 153.

⁷⁸ Chávez, interview by Marta Harnecker, “Chávez, Un Populista?: Hugo Chávez conversa con Marta Harnecker III” *Diario Vea*, August 3, 2004, p7.

CHAPTER THREE: HUGO CHÁVEZ'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS VENEZUELAN SUPPORTERS

Chávez's success is largely due to the loyal support he receives from Venezuela's poor and traditionally underrepresented sectors of society. Though Chávez initially enjoyed support from a wider class base, his radical posture caused various leaders and political groups, as well as some of the middle class to gradually withdraw their support, leaving the poor majority as the bedrock of support for Chávez and his revolution. Both the increasing allegiance among the poor and marginalized, and the alienation of sectors of the middle class are a result of Chávez's explicit appeal, both in the form of policy and style, to those sectors of society traditionally marginalized. This chapter will examine Chávez's relationship with his Venezuelan supporters, and demonstrate how further analysis of Chávez's style reinforces his classification as populist.

Chávez's support among the poor is well-known. Chávez's rhetoric and policy are clearly aimed at the poor, and in effect often offend the upper classes. Pro-Chávez demonstrations and political events generally take place in the poorer neighbourhoods of Caracas as opposed to oppositional rallies held in wealthier areas. Election results also show strongholds of support in more impoverished areas of the country. A 2003 poll elucidates this point further, showing that the poor and the very poor, which make up 80% of Venezuela's voting population, were twice as likely to vote for Chávez than the middle and upper class.¹ Also, a poll preceding the December 2006 presidential election revealed deep political divisions along class lines; it showed that 68% of those voting for Chávez were direct beneficiaries, or knew someone who was, to the Missions, the social programs developed by the Chávez government.² The poor indeed play an integral role in Chávez politics.

These supporters are crucial to Chávez's political sustenance. Frequent plebiscites (especially in the first year of his presidency) repeatedly called upon the people to defend various reforms and policies, and to decide upon the fate of the president himself. A clause added in the 1999 Constitution provides recourse for removing an unpopular official from any level of government. In June 2004, the opposition gathered the sufficient number of signatures to put a recall referendum into process.³ On August 15, 2004, almost ten million voters came out to decide whether

Chávez should indeed be recalled; 60% of those voting said “No”, indicating that Chávez should fulfill his mandate.⁴

Massive demonstrations have typified the years of Chávez’s leadership; chanting, banner waving, and sometimes violence occur during protests and rallies for both sides of the political terrain. As mentioned earlier, on April 11, 2002, a coup d’etat was carried out in Palacio Miraflores, the Venezuelan parliamentary building, occurring simultaneously with two of these standard marches. Chávez and top government officials were captured by a coalition of upper-level military officers, leaders from the oppositional parties, and Fedecámaras (the business federation), who then proclaimed power via a defacto government. The loyal members of the Chávez camp managed to get word to his supporters that a coup had been staged, and that, despite media claims to the contrary, Chávez had not surrendered. As the news spread, passionate Chavistas took to the streets to demand the reinstatement of the president. With Venezuela at the brink of civil war, the opposition conceded defeat and Chávez was returned to power.

The mobilization of Chávez’s supporters is imperative to his staying power as the country’s president. The spirited response of “el pueblo” to defend Chávez is due to the relationship fostered between them. This chapter will discuss the motifs that characterize Chávez’s style and image, using primary sources like *Aló Presidente*, presidential addresses and publications, television footage, interviews. Government reports and newspapers articles are also analyzed. There are three main factors that secure this allegiance from poor, lower class Venezuelans: Chávez’s radicalism; his personable, casual rapport; and his use of historical references.

Chávez’s style inspires and excites the Venezuelan people. (As will be seen, public addresses are far from a dull passive viewing by the audience.) Certainly a prominent characteristic of Chávez’s style is the sensationalism and provocative tone of his rhetoric. Denouncing President Bush and proclaiming to usher in “socialism of the 21st century” are notable examples. Emotional appeals, often with religious overtones and rhetorical adeptness, are evident and important in Chávez’s appeal. As demonstrated earlier, these qualities are shared among the classical populists of Latin American history. The case of Chávez differs, however, when analyzing the substance of his speech. Chávez extends the stylistic models and tropes of classical populism to provide content

that is not mind-numbing, but encourages supporters to question structures and embrace change. The central focus of Chávez's discourse is to educate and politicize Venezuelan (and international) audiences.

Venezuelans were clearly frustrated with the previous government and the decadent political system in place. Like so many Latin American countries, positions of prestige in Venezuela were normally reserved only for the white upper class. Chávez represented a complete break from the past. The radicalism of his image and political campaign was very alluring as was the fact that Chávez is of a mixed blood and poor origin. The media makes this fact visible. More importantly, Chávez *identifies* himself as mestizo.

Chávez's background as a military officer evokes wariness and suspicion. This may not seem particularly "radical" when considering the many military dictatorships of recent Latin American history. (The dark sunglasses and menacing image of Chile's General Augusto Pinochet likely comes to mind.) In much of Latin America the military has been associated with a repressive elite and a military career has become a means to elevate one's status. However, in Venezuela, the military is characterized by middle and lower class makeup, and has remained separate from politics for decades. Under Chávez, the military has come to symbolize opposition to Venezuela's traditionally elite-dominated politics. By frequently donning his military uniform and beret in public appearances, Chávez draws attention to this break from the military's traditional role.⁵ Chávez's opponents point to his close alliance with the military as dangerous, objecting to several appointments of military officers to government positions and other military involvement in civilian affairs.⁶ As well, numerous cases of alleged human rights abuses in Venezuela, such as police brutality and threats to human rights workers, further contribute to the view of Chávez as a military strongman or dictator.⁷

Apart from personal character and background, Chávez's radicalism is evident in his confrontational style, inflammatory language, and the controversial content of his agenda. In concrete terms, Chávez's plans mean dramatic alterations for Venezuela. The creation of a new Constitution was a central issue of Chávez's political platform in the 1998 elections. Once elected, Chávez was called to swear upon the Constitution during his inaugural ceremonies. He often retells the story of his distress caused by this

moment; as a way to complete the ceremonies yet still show his disdain for the system itself, Chávez's oath was as follows: "I swear before this waning constitution that I will do everything in my power to give our people a true Magna Carta worthy of their dreams."⁸ Shortly afterwards, as one of his first presidential acts, steps were taken to initiate this project. A referendum was held in July 1999 seeking permission to draft a new Constitution, and in December of that same year, the final draft was passed.⁹ The creation of a new constitution not only symbolized a new future for Venezuela, but opened avenues to effect change. Among the many changes, longer presidential terms, expanded executive power, and a transition from a bi-cameral to a uni-cameral legislature were enacted.¹⁰

Chávez has likened the 1999 Constitution to the Popol Vuh – in reference to the sacred Mayan text, meaning "Book of the Community."¹¹ This should not be considered a mere attempt to draw connection with the great indigenous heritage of the Mayans, but is representative of the new inclusive form of politics intended by the document. Pocketsize copies of the Constitution are sold on practically every street corner throughout Venezuela. Chávez frequently uses the document to argue the legality of and public approval for the policies and actions of his government.

Many changes have been made to the social structure of the country. Falling under the broad slogan of "the Bolivarian Missions," a series of newly established social welfare and education programs cater to the needs of the poor. Mission Barrio Adentro, one of the most prominent and successful programs, brings free Medicare services to poor communities through the assistance of several thousand Cuban doctors. Various levels of educational services are provided through the Missions Sucre, Ribas, and Robinson, which range from a basic alphabetization program to university level courses. Basic subsistence needs are met through Mission Habitat, which offers construction of low-cost housing for the poor, and Mission Mercal, through markets that sell food and consumer goods at discounted prices. All of these programs and more represent the radical restructuring of Venezuela under Chávez's rule.¹²

Likewise, land reform has also been a priority. The Land Act of December 2001 has since distributed over 5.5 million acres of government land to small peasant cooperatives. The government has also repatriated several large holdings, which were

underdeveloped or unused, following a new decree passed last year.¹³ Mission Zamora, one of the many Bolívarian missions, oversees land distribution and “the eradication of the latifundio.”¹⁴ Progress in urban land reform is also significant; over 84,000 titles have been given out to 126,000 families living in the poverty-stricken and crowded “barrios” through grass-roots organizations called Urban Land Committees established in February 2002.¹⁵

Venezuela’s Indigenous people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. Most live in remote areas spread across Venezuela’s diverse terrain of Amazonian rainforest, grassland plains (“los llanos”), and the mountainous Andes. Chávez has taken a keen interest in the state of these people, both socially and culturally. He recognizes the importance of preserving Indigenous tradition and culture, and has made several advances in this area. In the New Constitution of 1999, the rights to political, social, and cultural organization were codified. “The Book” itself has been translated and published in all of Venezuela’s indigenous languages. Mission Guaicaipuro was launched in October of 2003 to ensure Indigenous people understand their rights. One of its foci has been on land claims. Indigenous peoples have been granted 6,800 km² of lands in communal titles since its creation.¹⁶ Additionally, in a symbolic move, “Columbus Day” has been renamed “Indigenous Rights Day” in honour of the historical struggle of Indians in the early contact period. Chávez attributes his sympathy for the plight of the Venezuelan Indigenous peoples to his own indigenous ancestry. In an interview he stated, “... I feel the Caribbean stirring within me, because I am Indian, mixed with African, with a touch of white thrown in.”¹⁷

The media has been a significant tool in informing the Venezuelan public of the progress made in political and social issues. These developments have been highly publicized by government agencies, and mentioned frequently by Chávez. Although scholar Silvio Waisbord considers television to be “the ultimate populist medium”¹⁸ due to its ability to convey charisma and personal appeal, it has also served another purpose for Chavez.

Chávez’s populism, in fact, is contingent upon the education and empowerment of the Venezuelan people. Without it, Chávez could not hope to ‘revolutionize’ an entire country. For this reason, literacy and education Missions have been promoted so

strongly. The Constitution is sold by every street vendor and community courses are offered to explain its content so that all Venezuelans can fully understand their rights. Frequent public announcements by the government, and the opportunity to phone-in to “Aló Presidente” also serve educational purposes.

To further this educative goal, the Chávez government has created or promoted several new means of communication, in order to combat the aggressive upper-class media, and the adverse effects of globalization and commercialism on the media’s content. Chávez revamped the national network to offer more programming and additional channels. Internet resources have also been expanded. The creation of Telesur, a South American television network, has also been instrumental in providing a different perspective on regional events. The mandatory broadcast of ‘important’ government announcements is another effort to restore the responsibility of public service to the media. The media, therefore, is valuable to the Bolivarian movement, both in terms of conveying Chávez’s unique style and exporting its substantial message.

Chávez’s political style is also radically different from past Venezuelan leaders because of his apparent honesty and openness with the public. Through the media, he is able to speak to his supporters in a more intimate setting. In an unguarded and forward manner, Chávez voices his opinions on many different topics. Chávez professes a great love of learning and reading. He is constantly exploring his own ideas and is the first to admit that he is always growing and changing, which implicitly encourages his supporters to do likewise. Added to this are Chávez’s perceived open, honest character and his talkative nature. Thus, over the years, this process of “figuring himself out” and his exploration of different political values and ideologies are quite openly documented through early speeches and interviews.

His views on democracy are one example. In the formative years between the 1992 coup and the 1998 election, Chávez did not hold the system of democracy in high regard. He stated in an early interview that liberal democracy¹⁹ and its paradigm was rightly coming to an end.²⁰ In justifying this position, he explained that one cannot take a foreign-made system and simply apply it to a very different culture and people, which he considered to be the case with Venezuela’s democratic experience. “Democracy is like a rotten mango...What we have to do is get its seeds and take care to make a new

plant...that can grow in a different Venezuela.”²¹ In today’s context, where the social reality is far from equal, Chávez believes that this type of democracy creates a political elite based on who controls the wealth. Yet clearly Chávez later came to a new opinion of this political ideology, arriving at an acceptance of its principles and abilities. Chávez believes in *participatory democracy* (as opposed to *liberal democracy*), which strives to include every citizen in the decision-making process. Testament to this is that Chávez chose the electoral path, and put aside violent means, to generate change in Venezuela. Also, in the first two years of his presidency Chávez clearly demonstrated his respect for the democratic process by holding two referendums and three elections.²² In every action taken by him and his Bolívarian government, Chávez defends himself by pointing to the democratic nature of his policies. He also, begrudgingly at times, contends that honouring democratic codes are not always the easiest or most efficient means to carry out change, especially considering the polarized political environment in Venezuela. In a 2005 interview, he said, “We are obliged to respect laws that are very often contradictory to, or put the brakes on, the revolutionary process itself. That is a heavy burden for us to bear.”²³

Changes of opinion such as this make Chávez’s movement sometimes difficult to understand. It is easy to be confused about Chávez’s true opinions. Under a veil of rhetoric and faced with altered and contradictory expressions over time, interpreting Chávez can at times be difficult. In the case of democracy, he has come full circle in his position. Another example is his changing views on socialism. There was a time when Chávez freely categorized his movement as socialist, but he now seems to be distancing himself from older recognized forms of socialism, including Castro’s. Chávez asserts that he is not Marxist, or Communist, but recently describes himself as simply “Bolívarian”, a unique construct that speaks to the development of a “third way,” historically common to populist-style leadership. However, he has continued to call his movement socialist. In a conference early in 2006, Chávez said, we must, “transform the mode of capital and move towards socialism, towards a new socialism that must be constructed every day.”²⁴ These modifications in political thought make it easy for his opponents to criticize him. They are able to pick and choose references from his many public speeches or published works. As well, they sometimes point to these

inconsistencies as claims that he is not fit to rule, or that he is “crazy.” For these reasons, Chávez’s unorthodox and open style has alarmed some people. These same qualities, however, have helped secure immense support from the poor and underrepresented classes of Venezuela.

A second aspect of Chávez’s political style is his innate ability to touch people in a personal and intimate way. This ability is often cited by common Venezuelans as the reason for their political backing of Chávez. Patricia Marquez’s interviews with the Venezuelan poor highlight this sentiment. A few typical responses were: “I like how he speaks because it comes from the heart.” “He tells the truth.” “Chávez is a good man. He is helping all of us.” “Before him, all we had were promises. All the stuff was for those high-up there, not for us in the barrios.”²⁵ They feel that Chávez talks directly to them, and is devoted to improving their lives.

Chávez not only interacts with the public in a very personable way, he also makes it a priority to nurture this relationship. Never before have the poor of Venezuela had a politician take such notice of them, let alone treat them as equals. Chávez is often documented in video and photos socializing with the crowds of people at any of his numerous public appearances. He embraces his supporters and calls them either by name or by the endearing term “hermano/a”, meaning brother or sister. He also joins them in song in the streets.²⁶

Chávez speaks to the people as one of his own; his speech is not heavily laden with formalities and bewildering language. One survey in Caracas found that 62% of those interviewed liked his speech “very much.”²⁷ One Venezuelan scholar argues that Chávez’s simple, traditional message in the 1998 presidential campaign, in contrast to the flashy posters and expensive television shows of his adversaries, contributed to his 1998 electoral success.²⁸

Chávez’s speeches include a degree of humility, ardency, and flattery. Chávez regularly asserts that he is not anyone special, but just like them. He is part of a “nation of dreamers”²⁹, who are convinced that some day justice can be achieved for all Venezuelans. He has declared that the years of injustice and thievery on the part of the government must be stopped and the people must reclaim what is rightfully theirs. Yet beyond his assertion that he is ordinary, he confidently rises to the role he has been given

in the Venezuelan struggle. His fervent commitment to end disparity and inequality arouses and encourages his many supporters. “Every year that is left in my life I dedicate completely to the fight of the Venezuelan people, whom I love more than my own life.”³⁰ Though it is downplayed, a sense of messianic authority is not lost on Chávez or his followers. “I’m obliged to fight for the weakest. To struggle, from my soul, for the poor and the most needy. That’s why I’m here.”³¹

Chávez constantly compliments common Venezuelans who, he says, inspire this struggle. He credits the military officers for their work in the Vargas flood tragedy of December 1999 and returning him safely after his capture in April 2002. He praises the people for their stamina and perseverance in the face of adversity, their faith and trust in the Bolivarian project, and their commitment and patriotism. He calls them “warrior people”³² with great love and strength, frequently applauding the virtues of Venezuelans.

Chávez’s regular contact with the Venezuelan people is conducted through recurrent interviews, television broadcasts, and informal gatherings. However, the most successful and innovative method of communication is his weekly interactive radio program. “Aló Presidente” provides an opportunity for direct contact with normal Venezuelans by allowing them to phone in their questions, criticisms, and comments for their president. Chávez’s performance in these programs exemplifies an unusual style. Through four hours of conversation, Chávez demonstrates both stamina and an ability for spontaneous creativity matched only by Cuban President Fidel Castro. Chávez has ample opportunity to converse about many topics, topics not always relevant to political affairs. The show features conversation with adoring followers interspersed with soliloquies from the chief executive on topics such as the joys of having a girlfriend and ‘the revolutionary process in the universities.’”³³ The sometimes strange subject matter of his program allows his supporters to feel that they finally have a president that they can relate to and understand.

In formal public appearances, the energy and responsiveness of the crowd is overwhelming. A formidable union is clearly present between the audience and its speaker. Public rallies are less like a political presentation than a commander rallying his troops or a coach giving a pre-game speech. For example, this address given to a Caracas crowd is typical: As Chávez walks to the podium, the crowd enthusiastically shouts

“Viva!” or “Chávez no se va!” (Chávez will not go!) with loud cheering and applause. Chávez later ends his talk by sending a “Bolívarian hug, a revolutionary hug” and a “see you later.”³⁴ Similar speeches involve song and cheers echoed back and forth.

Another important element of Chávez’s relationship with “the people” is his use of history to connect with the common experiences of his supporters. He himself is an avid reader of many different forms of literature, and has done substantial writing of his own.³⁵ He recalls being enthralled from a very early age by stories of the War of Independence told to him by his grandmother. Chávez argues that history has great power to educate and generate understanding for future development. He says the goal of history is for a people “to know themselves, to know where they come from, their historical process, the evolution of their history...History is not just an epic. History is the history of their culture, how it was formed, how do we have this color, why is it called Venezuela, what has been the process that has made us what we are today.”³⁶ His speeches are peppered with historical examples used to provide explanations for present circumstances. He also argues that the forces of history are greater than any individual person. “As leader,” Chávez says, “I am partly a prisoner of history itself, of historical consequences.”³⁷ We all have a role to play in the historical process, he asserts, but we are also simply one piece of a much larger picture.

Chávez’s personal fascination and appreciation for history combined with his oratorical abilities result in frequent mention of historical figures and events in public speeches and interviews. This has become an important technique in arousing his followers, as they relate to familiar illustrations in an intimate way. Chávez also possesses a remarkable ability to manipulate historical images to fit his agenda. This appropriation of history is very effective.

Simón Bolívar is the principal symbol for Chávez’s political movement. Chávez’s initial movement, a loosely defined assemblage of young military officers, was called MBR-200 (Bolívarian Revolutionary Movement 200.) The name of his official political party was changed to the Fifth Republic Movement because existing restrictions prohibit the use of Bolívar’s name for political organizations; however, the historical implications are preserved in the acronym MVR which produces the same pronunciation as its predecessor.³⁸ The most obvious tribute to Bolívar is the legal change of the country’s

name to incorporate reference to the revolutionary leader: The Bolívarian Republic of Venezuela.

Bolívar is an icon of immense proportions. “El Liberador”, from Caracas, is revered by many in a number of South American countries for his leadership in the nineteenth century revolutionary wars against Spanish colonialism. Venezuela has a long-standing adoration for their hero; literally every town has a “Plaza Bolívar” as the central gathering place, the national currency is called “Bolívares,” and Caracas in particular is home to endless heritage sites and museums to commemorate him.

Chávez mentions Bolívar constantly, whether it be quoting the leader’s teachings or drawing upon historic examples from Bolívar’s life. The following speech given at the Urban Land Title Ceremony in Caracas, January 11, 2003 is typical: Chávez argued, “Bolívar once said, ‘Justice is the queen of all republican virtues.’” Chávez then asserted that Venezuela desires peace, and Christ himself said that peace is only possible with justice. He continued, “Bolívar lived and died for peace, but he was betrayed by the oligarchy and left humiliated, expelled, alone to die. But now Bolívar’s dream is alive, alive in the streets of La Vega, in the Venezuelan people, ‘This is Bolívar!’”³⁹ The crowd replied with enthusiastic cheers and applause.

The tremendous respect for Bolívar confers instant endorsement for all activities associated with his name. As one scholar writes, “The Bolívarian cloak has cleverly rendered Chávez’s actions unquestionable in the eyes of Venezuela’s poor masses and the middle class. At the same time, it turns his critics into not just political opponents, but unpatriotic naysayers suspected of serving non-nationalist interests.”⁴⁰ In an interview, Chávez described his opposition as “a small privileged sector [who] do not have respect for the country. They do not have any kind of Venezuelan pride or sense of nationality.”⁴¹ He was then asked to comment on why some intellectuals who had once supported him are now his opponents. Chávez answered that everyone has the right to their opinion, “But I follow Bolívar who said, ‘Before the claims of those who believe that they are wise, I prefer the advice of the people.’ The people are indeed wise.”⁴²

This is certainly not the first time that a leader has evoked the image of Bolívar as a means to gain the popular support of the populace. Nonetheless, Bolívarian rhetoric has grown exponentially under Chávez, all with specific purpose. According to historian

Richard Gott, Chávez's use of Bolívar is not merely a way of generating national pride. "This is not an exercise in mindless nationalism," he said, "[Chávez's] purpose is not just to venerate a figure to whom most of his predecessors have only paid lip service, but also to rescue the historical character and achievements of the Liberator from the accretions of myth and fable."⁴³

The most fitting use of Bolívar as an emblem for Chávez's movement is Bolívar's struggle to end colonialism and all forms of foreign domination. The struggle to 'liberate' Venezuela again has led to the implementation of many programs aiming to address the social imbalance and reform international relations and economic principles. Secondly, Bolívar represents the dream of a South American confederacy and the goal to establish unity among Southern nations in order to advance their place in the world.

Bolívar, however, was a contradictory figure. The message of Bolívar can be interpreted in many different ways, which is one reason why Chávez is constantly defining what "Bolivarianismo" is. In Venezuela, where reverence for Bolívar is strong, he has been called everything from an environmentalist, an anti-imperialist, and even a feminist.⁴⁴ Chávez, too, recognizes the versatility of Bolívar's personage as a symbol. As he has argued, "Bolívar is not just a man, Bolívar is a concept. More than just a theory, Bolívar is a complex set of ideas related to politics, society, and justice."⁴⁵

On the surface, Bolívar certainly is a suitable and powerful banner for Chávez's political movement, however, with numerous discrepancies. First, for all of Chávez's verbal attacks against the vile and corrupt elite, Bolívar was essentially one of these. He was the only son of aristocratic parents who died early in his life leaving him their affluent estate. Bolívar spent most of his early adulthood traveling Europe and the United States with his various tutors. He was certainly not "of poor peasant stock,"⁴⁶ to which Chávez lays claim.

Though Bolívar hailed the virtues of freedom and autonomy, he was, initially at least, very exclusive and elitist in his vision for a sovereign Venezuela. Bolívar's Revolution is in stark contrast to Chávez's Bolivarian movement, which is primarily focused on the betterment of the lower classes. In Venezuela's first attempt at succession, Bolívar recruited only among the middle to upper classes, not allowing the

poor or the slaves to participate. As it happened, Bolívar was forced to reconsider when his forces failed.⁴⁷

Additionally, Bolívar and Chávez also differ in their views regarding the military's function. Since Chávez's election as president, the military has become increasingly involved in political affairs, through political appointments and government-sponsored programs, much to the alarm of many. Chávez considers this military-civilian alliance to be essential. In contrast, Bolívar was utterly opposed to military interference in any way.⁴⁸ Usually these incongruencies are simply ignored, but at times Chávez has dismissed them as evidence of Bolívar's human character, making errors as we all do.

Chávez has also resuscitated other heroic revolutionary leaders into the country's historical memory. Ezequiel Zamora, José Feliz Ribas, and Antonio José de Sucre have joined Bolívar in Chávez's regeneration of the "glory days" of Venezuela's past. Felix Ribas and José de Sucre, along with Bolívar's tutor, Simón Rodríguez, have Mission programs named in their honour. Chávez has specifically used Ribas as an example to motivate the youth. In 1814, Ribas won a decisive battle against the Royalists with very inexperienced troops made up mostly of young students.⁴⁹ Because of that battle, Venezuela celebrates a national holiday called "Youth Day." Zamora has a personal appeal for Chávez due to his great grandfather's participation in Zamora's troops. In campaigning for the 1999 referendum to create a new constitution, Chávez spoke to a crowd about Zamora's historic battle of Santa Inés in which he positioned the "no" voters as Zamora's opponents and the "yes" camp as the valiant winners.⁵⁰

Simón Rodríguez, a tutor who helped mold Bolívar's intellectual development, has also received attention from Chávez. Rodríguez impressed upon Bolívar the uniqueness of the Latin American experience. In 1828, in an early piece of writing, Rodríguez wrote: "Spanish America is an original construct. Its instructions and its government must be original as well, as so too must be the methods used to construct them both. Either we shall invent, or we shall wander around and make mistakes."⁵¹ This instruction had a profound impact on Bolívar, and over a century later, has influenced Chávez as well. This "invent or err" idea has been quoted several times by Chávez for various purposes, in explanation of political beliefs, concepts behind proposed social programs, and in seeking appeal for international project initiatives.⁵²

Aside from Venezuela's homegrown heroes, Chávez has also drawn upon other widely known historical figures. One individual frequently raised by Chávez is Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Informally known as "Che" (meaning friend), Guevara is internationally celebrated for his bravery and commitment to social justice and liberty, and venerated for his dedication to revolution. Given Chávez's admiration of Cuba and its experience, it is quite natural that he would speak of Che in relation to his own revolutionary struggle. During an Aló Presidente show, Chávez introduced Che's daughter who was conducting a series of interviews with him. He praised her father as "one of the greatest revolutionaries in the history of the Americas and the world" and one who was always loyal to his ideals. He also proceeded to call all of Cuba's dedicated doctors working in the Barrio Adentro program "Che Guevara's sons and daughters" standing "side by side with the Bolivarian people."⁵³

This admiration of Che existed from the beginning. For a time during his military career, Chávez gave lectures at a training college, where he was once called in by his superiors to explain just how a uniformed second lieutenant could be speaking about Bolívar and Che Guevara in the same breath.⁵⁴ Although he responded very flippantly, Chávez surreptitiously approved of Che's movement, despite being a military officer who would be expected to despise such guerilla tactics.

Even modern-day United States heroes may serve various political objectives for Chávez. Chávez celebrated Martin Luther King Jr., the great civil-rights leader of the 1950s and 60s, for his progress in achieving racial equality in the United States. During 2005's anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" speech, Venezuelan public television aired a commemorative special on King's humanitarian efforts, with subtle analogies to Chávez's struggle for ethnic and social equality in Venezuela.⁵⁵ Chávez has found a new friend in Reverend Jesse Jackson, a champion of African American rights; on one occasion Chávez invited him to co-host a session of Aló Presidente. Jackson, in turn, praised Chávez's work with indigenous rights and his offer of cheap oil for poor American citizens affected by the disaster of Hurricane Katrina.⁵⁶

The Catholic Church commands considerable authority and respect among most Venezuelans. Naturally this influence is reflected in the content of Chávez's speech as well as his personal ideals and faith. Chávez speaks out of the context of Latin American

liberation theology, an ideological movement that began in the 1960s propelling the belief that Jesus Christ's earthly message was to care for one's brother, specifically focusing on the poor and the needy. Liberation theologians envisioned a certain kind of community based on Jesus' teaching and believed the Church was called to usher in these changes. In this context, according to one scholar, "...values such as altruism, community, solidarity, and the redistribution of wealth are elevated over individualism, material success, competition and profit growth."⁵⁷ In an interview in September 2005, Chávez discussed the goals of his "revolution" and displayed clear agreement with these beliefs. He said, "One of the greatest rebels, who I really admire, is Christ. He was a rebel. He ended up being crucified. He was a great rebel. He rebelled against the established power that subjugated. That is what rebellion is: it is rebellion out of love for human beings. In truth, that is the cause, the cause of love: love for every human being, for every woman, for every child, for every brother."⁵⁸

Chávez confidently proclaims God's favour for his movement, which focuses on the plight of the poor; "This is God's fight; God, the redeemer of the people, whom today, 2002 years after his birth, is more alive than ever. Long live Christ, the savior of the people, forever!"⁵⁹ In a 2003 speech, he even quoted scripture, Romans 8:31, saying, "If God is with us, who can be against us?"⁶⁰ Chávez has also occasionally confronted the Catholic Church in Venezuela for their lack of cooperation in this very "pious" struggle. His personal beliefs, however, are not overly clear. He outwardly proclaims himself a faithful Catholic. His religious sentiment is also somewhat eccentric, or at least altered, by this humanist statement: "God, for me, is the people."⁶¹ Regardless of his alignment with accepted Catholic beliefs, Chávez plainly uses the historical figure of Jesus to propel his movement forward. As seen with all of these historical references, Chávez possesses an acute understanding of public sentiment and how it can be cultivated into popular support.

The poor Venezuelan majority who support Chávez are extremely important for his political viability. Both the message and the mode are critical pieces of Chávez's appeal. Informative content, which champions basic human and citizens' rights, is essential to Chávez's plan for Venezuela. His style, radical yet familiar to the common people, has made Chávez's profound message more palatable. The effects of this are

evident. Social organization at the grassroots level has multiplied in previous years. Political participation, whether in rallies or official parties, has also grown. Education and literacy has improved through the Mission programs. There is also a growing movement of community radio in Venezuela, which seeks to restore integrity and diversity to the media.⁶²

Chávez's political style and public image have been successful, based on his sizeable support-base and numerous advances in achieving policy objectives. The carefully cultivated mutual relationship of admiration and trust between Chávez and his followers originated early on and has remained a high priority, as Chávez continues to reshape Venezuela in accordance with his Bolivarian vision.

¹Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, GQR/POS poll. As noted in Justin Delacour, "Spinning 'Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics' in Venezuela" *venezuelanalysis.com*, July 31, 2004. www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1228.

²Ipsos News Center, "AP/Ipsos: Venezuela Pre-Election Results" Nov. 23, 2006. <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3280>

³Article 72, The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. "All [...] offices filled by popular vote are subject to revocation. Once one-half of the term of office to which an official has been elected has elapsed, a number of voters representing at least 20% of the registered voters in the affected constituency may petition for the calling of a referendum to revoke that official's mandate."

⁴"Referendum Presidencial 2004" Consejo Nacional Electoral. http://www.cne.gov.ve/referendum_presidencial2004/

⁵The Venezuelan military is also unique in the fact that most officers have had some degree of university education (as stated in the introductory chapter) causing them to be more socially and politically conscious.

⁶Chávez believes strongly in civilian-military cooperation. Plan Bolívar (2000) was established with the specific objective of engaging the two groups in various service projects. He often quotes Mao Zedong saying, "The people are to the army like the water is to the fish." Chávez, interview by Marta Harnecker, *Understanding the Bolivarian Revolution: Hugo Chávez talks to Marta Harnecker*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 73-82. And Chávez, interview by Aleida Guevara March, *Chávez, Venezuela, and the New Latin America*, (Melbourne & New York: Ocean Press, 2005), 12.

⁷ Amnesty International, “AI Report 2005: Venezuela”

<http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/ven-summary-eng>. And Human Rights Watch, “Safety of Human Rights Defenders in Venezuela” April 19, 2002.

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/04/chavez0419-ltr.htm>

⁸Chávez in Guevara, 35.

⁹ The constitution was passed with 71.78% approval.

¹⁰ Gregory Wilpert, “Venezuela’s New Constitution” *venezuelanalysis.com*, August 27, 2003. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1003>

¹¹ “The Revolution Will Not be Televised” prod. David Power and The Irish Film Board, dir. Kim Bartley and Donnacha O’Briain, (Dublin, The Irish Film Board, 2003)

Accessed as “Inside the Coup” *The Passionate Eye*, CBC, April 13, 2003.

¹² The Venezuelan government website, www.gobiernoenlinea.ve, provides information on all of these programs and more.

¹³ Jorge Martin, “Venezuela Announces War Against “Latifundios” *venezuelanalysis.com*, January 14, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1351>. The “Zamora Decree” was passed on the anniversary of Ezequiel Zamora’s death, January 10th, 2005. Zamora was a revolutionary war leader whose rallying cry was “Free land and men – War against the Latifundia.”

¹⁴ Misión Zamora. Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, www.gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/miscelaneas/misionzamora.pdf (June, 2006)

¹⁵ Gregory Wilpert, “Venezuela’s Quiet Housing Revolution: Urban Land Reform” *venezuelanalysis.com*, September 12, 2005.

www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1551

¹⁶ “Mision Guaicaipuro: Patrio para los Pueblos Indigenas” Republica Bolivariano de Venezuela, www.misionguaicaipuro.gov.ve/ (March, 2006)

¹⁷ Chávez in Guevara, 15

¹⁸ Silvio Waisbord, “Media Populism: Neopopulism in Latin America” in *The Media and Neo-Populism*. eds. Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Steward, and Bruce Horsefield, (Westport & London: Praeger, 2003), 213.

¹⁹ It is interesting to consider the common understanding of “democracy” in Venezuela. Mariano-Steeves points out that although liberalism and democracy are now considered inseparable in the North American view, the original meaning of democracy is different. Instead of individuals as the primary focus, democracy would have a different meaning if we premised the common good of the group. Therefore, when Chávez rejects the paradigm of “liberal democracy,” he is really rejecting the notions of individualism and liberalism. See Fornerino-Steeves’ dissertation for more on how Venezuela’s liberal democracy was degenerated into a ‘false’ democracy. Marinés Morela Fornerino-Steeves, “One Hundred Years of Liberalism: The Venezuela that Chávez inherited and the Venezuela that Chávez is re-making” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002).

²⁰ Chávez, interview by Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *Venezuela del 04F-92 al 06D-98: Habla el Comandante Hugo Chávez Frías*. (Caracas: Fundación Pío Tamayo, 1999), 121.

²¹ *Ibid*, 121

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- ²² In July 1999, referendum for and election of a Constitutional Assembly; in December 1999, constitutional election; July 2000 election of National Assembly; December 2000 referendum on whether labour unions should have state-monitored elections.
- ²³ Chávez in Guevara, 47.
- ²⁴ Linking Alternatives II Conference, Vienna, May 13, 2006, Gregory Wilpert, “The Meaning of 21st Century Socialism for Venezuela” *venezuelanalysis.com*, July 11, 2006. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1776>
- ²⁵ Patricia Marquez, “The Hugo Chávez Phenomenon: What do “the People” Think?” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict*. eds. Ellner and Hellinger, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003), 208-210.
- ²⁶ Bartley and O’Brian, “The Revolution Will Not be Televised” documentary
- ²⁷ Rita Angélica Martínez Sosa, *Análisis Situacional del Discurso de Hugo Chávez Presidente de Venezuela*. (PhD diss., Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, 1999), 120. 15% of the survey participants did not like his manner of speaking and 23% said he talks too much and fails to make his message understood.
- ²⁸ Aivy Lisset Rodríguez Lozada, *La Propaganda Política de Hugo Chávez Frías en la Campaña Electoral de 1998*. (PhD diss., Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, 1999), 276.
- ²⁹ Chávez in Guevara, 17.
- ³⁰ Chávez, “Speech at the Urban Land Titling Ceremony, La Vega, Caracas. January 11, 2003” in *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela: The Life of the Homeland is at stake here: speeches and addresses Dec.2002-Jan.2003*. (Havana: Ediciones Plaza, 2003), 144.
- ³¹ Chávez, interview by Greg Palast, “Venezuela President Hugo Chávez: Interview” *The Observer (BBC Newsnight)*, May 2, 2002. www.gregpalast.com/printerfriendly.cfm?artid=184 (October 2005)
- ³² Chávez in Guevara, 17
- ³³ Marylene Smeets, “Venezuela Radio Chávez: Populism meets the press as Venezuela’s brash new president takes to the airwaves” The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Feb. 2001 issue of CPJ Briefings: Press Freedom Reports. http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/Ven_feb01/Ven_feb01.html (November,2005)
- ³⁴ Chávez, “Speech at the Popular Demonstration in Caracas” January 23, 2003 in *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela*, 285.
- ³⁵ For a list of some of his short stories and poetry, “Nuestros Presidentes: Hugo Raphael Chávez Frías” Gobierno En Línea. <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/venezuela/ejecutivo.html> (April 2006)
- ³⁶ Chávez in Muñoz, 203.
- ³⁷ Chávez in Guevara, 57.
- ³⁸ In Spanish, the pronunciation of B and V are the same, thus Chávez was able to retain the original acronym for his movement.
- ³⁹ Chávez, “Speech at the Urban Land Titling Ceremony, La Vega, Caracas. January 11, 2003” in *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela*, 132.
- ⁴⁰ Howard LaFranchi, “ ‘Simón Says...’ Populist Leader Revives an Icon” *Christian Science Monitor* vol.92, no. 217 (2000), 2.
- ⁴¹ Chávez, interview by Ralph T. Niemeyer, *Under Attack: Morning Dawn in Venezuela*. (New York, iUniverse, 2005), 88.

⁴² Ibid, 92.

⁴³ Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*. (London & New York: Verso, 2005), 92.

⁴⁴ LaFranchi, 1.

⁴⁵ Chávez in Guevara, 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 71.

⁴⁷ Bolívar fought for the Royalist forces in his earlier military campaign, but after failure, he was forced to flee Venezuela and received aid from Haiti to continue the fight in 1816.

⁴⁸ LaFranchi, 2.

⁴⁹ “Fundación Misión Ribas,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, (<http://216.72.128.20/mribas/>) and Aló Presidente # 181, *gobiernoenlinea.ve*, http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/sharedfiles/Alo_Presidente_181.pdf/

⁵⁰ Gott, 114.

⁵¹ Simón Rodríguez quoted in Gott, 106.

⁵² Chávez in Blanco Munoz, 121 And Chávez, “President Chávez’s Speech to the United Nations” *venezuelanalysis.com*, September 15, 2005,

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1555> (September 2005)

⁵³ Chávez, “Aló Presidente 181” (transcript) 8 February 2004, Bolivarian University, Dtto. Zulia (http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/sharedfiles/Alo_Presidente_181.pdf) And in Guevara, 120.

⁵⁴ Chávez in Guevara, 27.

⁵⁵ Nikolas Kozloff, “Hugo Chávez and the Politics of Race” *venezuelanalysis.com*, October 15, 2005, <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php/articles.php?artno=1577> (March 2006) P7

⁵⁶ Chávez, “Aló Presidente 232 - October 2, 2005, Hospital Militar, Dtto. Capital”

Vive.gob.ve Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela

(<http://www.vive.gob.ve/inf.php?ns=A1%F3%20Presidente&p=3>)

⁵⁷ Sheila Collins, “Breaking the Mold? Venezuela’s Defiance of the Neoliberal Agenda” *New Political Science* vol.27, no.3 (Sept.2005): 385.

⁵⁸ Chávez in Ted Kopple, *Abc News*, September 16, 2005.

www.abcnews.go.com/Nightline/International/story?id=113498&page=1 (October 2005)

⁵⁹ Chávez, “Speech at the Popular Demonstration in Caracas” January 23, 2003 in *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela*, 268.

⁶⁰ Chávez “Speech at the Urban Land Titling Ceremony, La Vega, Caracas” January 11, 2003 in *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela*, 144.

⁶¹ Chávez (speech at 4th Hemispheric Conference Against the FTAA) in Michael Keefer, “Hugo Chávez Frías and the Sense of History” *venezuelanalysis.com*. May 3, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1437> (April 2006)

⁶² In 2002, there were 13 licensed community radio stations, and as of June 2005, there are 170 such stations. Funding comes in a modest one-time amount from the government, but mostly is raised through community support. Sujatha Fernandes, “Growing Movement of Community Radio in Venezuela” *venezuelanalysis.com*, December 26, 2005. www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1637

CHAPTER FOUR: HUGO CHÁVEZ'S DIPLOMACY IN THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Central to the Bolivarian vision is Latin American unification and solidarity. The amalgamation of the territories of Columbia, Venezuela, and Ecuador immediately following the end of Spanish colonialism attest to this. “Gran Columbia” clearly demonstrates Simón Bolívar’s idealist reverie for the whole of Latin America. Chávez adapted this desire into a more versatile form, envisioning a modern coalition of sorts, perhaps resembling the European Union. Chávez pushes for stronger ties within the sovereign Latin American community, through political collaboration, economic cooperation, and an emphasis on overall social progress. As Teo Ballvé stated in *The NACLA Report*, “Chávez understands regional integration, bloc-building, and South-South solidarity as vehicles for attaining national sovereignty amid coercive U.S. power.”¹ Chávez does not in any way see this unification as detracting from the independence of these nations. On the contrary, this coalition would result in greater authority and sovereignty over one’s affairs, by providing the necessary distance from U.S. influence and encroachment.

Chávez has adopted the same tools and utilized the same political style in pursuing these Latin American-wide goals as he did in building support within Venezuela. This chapter affirms Chávez’s populist character through emphasis of the populist characteristics in his diplomacy with the Latin American community. There are three main elements that characterize Chávez’s pursuit for stronger relations among Latin American countries. Chávez’s radicalism in image and policy encourages relationship with potential allies of similar background and mentality. A personable approach to diplomacy, in part due to Chávez’s character, and in part a conscious attempt to win over potential allies, has led to new and strengthened partnerships. Also, the use of history is a tool for unification, which commonly appears in Chávez’s rhetoric, particularly ‘demonizing’ the U.S. to convince others of the need for a ‘united front.’ In these ways, Chávez strives to create favourable conditions to spread Bolivarian ideals.

The solid relationships that have developed with regional leaders have been imperative to the success of Chávez, but could not be achieved without the practical incentive of trade and business at the heart of negotiation. Chávez’s greatest strength in

securing closer relations lies in the leverage of oil. In attempting to increase solidarity, this commodity has been instrumental. Even before Chávez was elected he understood the power of petroleum. "Oil is a geopolitical weapon," he declared, "and these imbeciles who govern us don't realize the power they have, as an oil-producing country."² In a 2005 interview, Chávez cited Venezuela's energy alliance with Cuba as an example of how "we use oil in our war against neoliberalism."³ As seen in diplomatic actions since his rise to presidency, this asset has been thoroughly expended. Oil has been at the forefront of all international relations. The newly established corporations, PetroSur, PetroCaribe, and PetroAndina, attest to the fruit of this labour.

Petrocaribe was established between fourteen Caribbean countries in June of 2004. At a meeting in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on September 7, 2005 these agreements were deepened with Venezuela committing to supply 77,300 barrels of crude and refined products per day to each country with a two-year grace period for payment at a 2% interest rate. Other terms were established, such as covering the rise if oil prices went up, and allowance to pay part in goods.⁴ This provision was used by Cuba for example, whose fiscal capital is small but who instead offered its expertise in the medical field. Some 12,000 Cuban doctors are now employed in Venezuela to run Mission Barrio Adentro, one of the many social programs introduced by Chávez, which brings free healthcare to poor neighborhoods and villages.⁵ Thirteen of the fifteen Caribbean nations have signed on to Venezuela's oil initiative.⁶ Chávez is trying to extend the triumph of the PetroCaribe model into South America, where his diplomacy is more focused. Oil agreements have so far been reached with Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, with others currently in development. PetroSur agreements would integrate regional oil and gas industries in a strategic manner and further increase the importance of Venezuela in the region.

All of these oil alliances are part of Chávez's ambitious dream of PetroAmerica. As Chávez told Marta Harnecker in an interview, "The five countries liberated by Bolívar are energy rich: they have gas and oil" so it is natural that they should work together, and then "why not include Mexico?" in order to create "a sort of OPEC right here in the region."⁷ PetroAmerica, a continent-wide energy company, would benefit regional development and economic stability by allowing them to bargain collectively with the

U.S. Just as oil has been used as a “weapon”, Venezuela’s power of oil is also used as a bridge for South American nation-building. Responding to a new oil deal with Ecuador in August 2005, NACLA editor Teo Ballvé forecast: “If things go this easily for Chávez in the coming years, he will rule the Andes with an oil fist. He will succeed with oil where Bolívar failed with armies to unite the Andes.”⁸

Of course, oil is not the only matter of business between Venezuela and neighbouring countries. Deals have been made by Venezuela to buy ships from Argentina, oil tankers from Brazil, and coca and other agricultural products from Bolivia. To facilitate such trade agreements, Chávez has a dream of ALBA, whose acronym means Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, in an attempt to counter what he considers the “wretched” Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Chávez rejects the FTAA. According to Chávez, the FTAA, a design proposed by the United States, is “a colonial, imperialist plan”⁹ which only exploits and abuses the people of Latin America. The neoliberal FTAA would “liberalize” trade between countries through elimination of subsidies, tariffs, and other barriers that prohibit exchange. As appealing as this language sounds, in reality, according to Chávez, “free trade” favours first world nations who have the financial and technological means to dominate the market. Therefore, while promising equality, Chávez argues that this systems breeds inequality; and for this reason it is rejected outright by Chávez. Chávez’s understanding of the FTAA also explains his oppositions to the ‘western’ view of democracy. Just as neoliberalism ‘equalizes’ all nations in the economic markets, liberal democracy ‘equalizes’ individuals in a political state. Chávez believes that the FTAA, and the broader construct of free market capitalism, would not benefit the country, or even the majority therein, but merely a small group of elites.¹⁰

Instead, Chávez offers an alternative system. ALBA is a model of trade that, according to one sympathetic newspaper, is “grounded in the principles of complementarity (rather than competition), solidarity (instead of domination), cooperation (not exploitation), and respect of sovereignty (instead of corporate rule).”¹¹ The Venezuelan bank, Bancoex, summarizes ALBA’s main objectives in language heavily influenced by Chávez’s speeches on the topic: “[ALBA] advocates a socially-oriented trade block [and] ...a reinvigorated sense of solidarity with the underdeveloped

countries of the western hemisphere, so that with the required assistance they can enter into trade negotiations on more favourable terms than have been the case under the dictates of developed countries.”¹² Only Castro and Morales have officially signed-on to ALBA, deeming it, in true populist form, “the People’s Trade Agreement.” Nonetheless, much appreciated support comes from Lula and Kirchner who have also rejected the FTAA and pushed for more integration and regional trade.

In December 2005, Venezuela joined the Latin American trading bloc, Mercosur,¹³ which if strengthened, could also play a major role in economic integration. At the G-15 Summit of March 2004, among many of Latin America’s political leaders, Chávez encouraged more action in this area: “Why not advance the system of trade preferences among developing countries that only exists symbolically, whereas the protectionism of the North expels our countries from the markets? Why not promote compensation trade and investment flows within the South instead of competing in a suicidal fashion among us, offering concessions to the multinationals of the North?”¹⁴ His speech continued with ways to promote regional integration.

Many joint projects and investments have also been made. Recently, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela have committed to a very ambitious program of building a 10,000-mile transnational gas pipeline through the three countries, costing an estimated \$20 billion over the next ten years. Venezuela is building an oil pipeline with Colombia to reach the Pacific. Also, in December 2005, Venezuela bought \$1 billion of Argentina’s debt, in order to shift its obligation from the U.S. to Venezuela and the southern bloc.

Outside of trade, several other ideas have been put forth by Chávez. In September 2005, Chávez moved all of its foreign currency reserves to Europe due to “threats” from the United States. On several occasions Chávez has proposed that the leaders consider establishing a South American development bank where they would deposit some of their reserves and which would also provide advantageous conditions for social and economic investment projects. Chávez said that Venezuela would be willing to give an initial deposit of five billion dollars to set the project into motion. This bank might later become a world bank, challenging the dominance of financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. “It is a stupidity that a majority of our international reserves are in

banks of the North,” said Chávez to the gathered leaders in Brasilia October 7, 2005, for a Summit of the South American leaders.¹⁵ He also spoke about the idea of a common currency (like the Euro.)¹⁶ These suggestions are presented as practicable and realistic ways to reduce dependency on the United States, and strengthen regional ties, which Chávez argues is essential to maintaining true sovereignty.

In addition, Chávez has also recognized the benefit of sharing culture and knowledge. In July 2005, Telesur was launched, a South American media network established by Chávez’s initiative. This network is intended to present issues of regional and cultural significance, as opposed to the monopoly of the Western media in both news and entertainment. At the ceremony, Chávez spoke about the importance of sharing knowledge: “A conscience of who we are is vital,” a vital element in establishing solidarity among the Latin American nations.¹⁷ Programs that focus on regional interests would contribute to heightened awareness of cultural distinctiveness and pride, a crucial aspect to achieving Bolivarian goals.

Although Chávez is sometimes criticized for undermining existing programs to create his own, he is in favour of reviving and developing some of the many institutions that already exist, but have simply been neglected or deemed a failure. In an interview with Harnecker, Chávez listed several of these and speculated as to why projects such as CEPAL (Latin American Economic Commission), ALADI (Association for Latin American Integration), and SELA (Latin American Economic System) have failed. “There are institutions,” he said, “that have elaborate integration proposals that could go over really well. Neoliberalism did almost all of them in.”¹⁸ In August 2006, in a letter to the South American presidents, Chávez proposed a commission to examine various issues, like resource sharing and community development. He reminded them, “We are not starting from scratch. We have a wealth of experience and knowledge that we should share.”¹⁹ All of these policies, those instituted and those merely proposed, demonstrate the cooperative approach that Chávez considers so valuable to the improvement of Latin American affairs.

By urging a stronger commitment to each other through policy proposals and programs, Chávez automatically, and purposefully criticizes the United States in attempting to convince Latin American leaders of the urgency of his argument. Anti-

Americanism is one of the defining features of Chávez's speech. Not surprisingly then, Venezuelan-United States relations are strained. Criticisms from both government administrations' have been frequently and increasingly hostile towards each other. As G. W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice question Chávez's intentions and deem Venezuela a "destabilizing force" in Latin American, Chávez has accused the United States of conspiring with his political opponents in Venezuela to remove his government.²⁰

There are many ways in which Chávez provokes the United States. First, Chávez has pursued relationships with so-called misfit nations – Iraq, Iran, Russia, China, Syria, and Libya – all to Washington's dismay. As a Petro-State president, and a founding member of OPEC, Chávez has been brought into close association with some of the U.S.' greatest adversaries in the Middle East. Likewise, Chávez's efforts to make China a greater trading partner have also come under suspicion. All of this aside, the relationship generating the most objection is undoubtedly Chávez's relationship with Cuba. The historic fracture between the U.S. and Cuba came shortly after Castro's nationalist revolution of 1959. The U.S. has since gone to great lengths to ostracize Castro from world events and has pressured others to abstain from all relations with Chávez. This pressure has failed with Chávez. An early attempt by the U.S. to dictate the policies of Chávez's governance was firmly rebuffed when Chávez refused to cancel his visit to Cuba at Washington's request.²¹ This early incident exemplifies the distinct path that Chávez's government would take, in contrast to a history of close adherence to the United States' wishes. Chávez continues to defy the U.S. by these relationships, in which he resolves to remain autonomous and free in his political and personal decisions. Also, the shared mistrust and outright contempt for the United States constitute an important element of these relationships.

Chávez has used anti-American rhetoric to strengthen his standing throughout Latin America. For some statesmen and citizens alike, Chávez's aggressive attack on the United States government, and particularly on George W. Bush, while generally successful, has had some drawbacks. Chávez brought his attack on the U.S. to a very public level at the September 15th, 2005 UN Summit in New York, criticizing the U.S. on numerous fronts. *The Washington Post* reported on Chávez's impact on those present:

U.N. experts and foreign envoys said Chávez, like Castro, was able to capitalize on a reservoir of resentment of American power in the world body. "Obviously people are pleased with what he said, but they cannot express themselves as frankly as he does," said one Arab ambassador. Chávez's popularity also reflected the penchant of some U.N. members for rallying around political figures who face attack by conservative U.S. lawmakers. (He generated the most applause of any speeches). The applause for Chávez was recognition of the "sheer entertainment factor" of his undiplomatic speech, said Nancy Soderberg, a former senior U.S. diplomat at the United Nations. "Those speeches get so boring." But Chávez would never be able to translate the popular reaction to his rant into political support for his positions because, while the moment "might be emotionally satisfying, [the delegates] know this is not the real world," said Jeffrey Laurenti, a seasoned U.N. analyst at the Century Foundation."²²

Chávez, however, strongly believes that this support is real, and presents a different reason for why this sentiment is not more often conveyed. In an interview with Cuban Aleida Guevara, Chávez said others feel the same way but are afraid to stand up against the U.S. At the Summit of the Americas in Quebec in 2001, Venezuela stood alone in its opposition to the United States, but afterwards some presidents of smaller countries came to express support for what Chávez said. When Chávez asked why they did not express this at the Summit, they answered, "we don't have oil, we are tiny."²³ Therefore, Chávez uses his boldness, combined with the security he has in oil, to stand up against "the bully of the block" and represent weaker voices.

Recent events have added to Chávez's repertoire of examples of U.S. encroachment. In August 2005, televangelist Pat Robertson caused a stir with his televised statement that the U.S. should have Chávez assassinated. The lack of apology from the U.S. government, and its supposed support of Robertson's statement, according to Chávez, has been mentioned incessantly by Chávez in public speeches and interviews. This followed a series of other incidents, all of which fueled the flame of Chávez's rhetoric.²⁴ In the summer of 2005, Chávez repeatedly made direct accusations that the U.S. was behind attempts to assassinate him. He announced, "If anything happens to me, the U.S. government is directly responsible."²⁵ Similar warnings came from Castro and Lula, and other public figures that urged calm in the escalating conflict. By using these examples, Chávez generates fear and suspicion for the United States among his

countrymen and his Latin American counterparts, who see the evidence presented to them.

Chávez's distaste for the U.S. and their policies extends to other "imperial" countries and close allies of Washington. However, an important fact to note is that Chávez's scorn for imperial leaders does not include "the common people." Despite feuds and controversy with several heads of state, Chávez reached out to its citizens. Chávez recently lashed out against Tony Blair, calling him an "imperialist pawn"²⁶ and a "main ally to Hitler" for supporting the U.S. war in Iraq, while continuing friendly visits all over Britain.²⁷ In November 2005, he made harsh statements about Mexican President Vicente Fox, calling him a "lap dog of the empire", which led to the withdrawal of both their ambassadors. Soon after, Chávez apologized to the Mexican people (not the President), offering love and friendship to his Mexican brethren, while donning a sombrero and singing Mexican folk songs. Chávez's suspicions of the United States do not inhibit his desire to help the poor in the US. In a brilliant political move, in December 2005 Chávez offered cheap oil to poor communities in Chicago, Boston, and New York, bypassing national trade deals to reach municipal needs.²⁸

In his fierce anti-American rhetoric, Chávez uses history to justify his opposition to the U.S. and persuade other leaders of the need for increased solidarity. Historical references frequent Chávez's political discourse. By presenting historic examples of struggles common to Latin American colleagues, and by quoting prominent leaders from the past and present which appear to endorse Chávez's view, Chávez gains valuable credibility for his international agenda. It is used to create a threat or danger in order to unite the peoples and leaders of Latin America. Chávez's use of history draws upon many of the major events in recent Latin American history. An abundance of examples can be given, and indeed they have been by Chávez, to argue that the United States is a threat to the sovereignty of Latin American nations. Chávez often refers to Bolívar and his wisdom in predicting the future problems that Latin America would have with the United States. Chávez has often spoken of "the Empire" as the cause of the people's suffering and frequently quotes Bolívar's letter in 1828 which states, "the U.S.A. seem predestined to plague America with misery in the name of liberty"²⁹

Revolutionary hero, *Simón Bolívar*, is an obvious symbol for Chávez's national agenda, but also very appropriate to his international objectives. Reverence for Bolívar exists throughout Latin America. He was, after all, "the liberator" of Columbia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, not just Venezuela. Chávez's homegrown supporters relish the mention of their national hero. Also, in Brazil during the World Social Forum in January 2005, the crowd welcomed Chávez with cheers and song about his taking up of Bolívar's sword: "Ah, oh, Chávez is not going to go! Beware; Bolívar's sword is traveling through Latin America!"³⁰ The memory of Bolívar is often evoked to inspire and unite Latin American leaders. In many speeches, Chávez praises the ideals of Bolívar, and reminds other leaders to honour his legacy. At the UN Summit in September 2005, Chávez appealed to world leaders regarding Southern oppression, and recalled the ideals of Bolívar: "We are thirsty for peace and justice in order to survive as species. Simón Bolívar, founding father of our country and guide of our revolution, swore to never allow his hands to be idle or his soul to rest until he had broken the shackles which bound us to the empire."³¹

Bolívar is also used to plead for cooperation in regional issues. Chávez wrote other Latin American leaders, saying, "Humbly, as one should always be, but also just as certain that in doing it we are responding to the challenge of unification that our Liberators left us, we hereby take up the words of Bolívar. In his call for a Treaty of Perpetual union, league, and Confederation, he asked for a continent-wide, perpetual pact of faithful and unwavering friendship and of close and intimate union between each and every one of its Parties. Such is the spirit that is voiced today by millions of South American compatriots."³² Though Bolívar's attempt to unite southern nations under one banner failed, Chávez builds upon Bolívar's dream to inspire cooperation and mutual respect for one another.

The overthrow and death of Salvador Allende on September 11th, 1973 is perhaps the most effective warning against U.S. encroachment. Chávez has taken the Allende story as a lesson for preparedness against U.S. military aggression in Venezuela. He has stated that the Bolivarian Revolution is peaceful, but not unarmed. He believes that it is essential for a people to be "capable, prepared, and armed for the integral defense of their country" because, if need be a violent confrontation would be necessary against

“dictatorial forces.”³³ He has even quoted John F. Kennedy for validation, who said, “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable.”³⁴ He has repeatedly stated his concurrence with Castro’s statement that, “If every labourer had been armed, the coup in Chile would never have happened.”³⁵ On several occasions, Chávez has expressed interest in creating a Latin American military defense force, like a Latin American NATO.³⁶ In an interview with Marta Harnecker, he suggested this, stating several examples throughout history where Latin America should have come together to prevent various abuses from occurring, incidents like the Argentina’s loss of the Falkland Islands to England, and the *Santa Aliaza* attack on Ecuador. He believes that a united South should have prevented these travesties.³⁷

Neoliberalism is also a frequent topic in Chávez’s discourse, as seen in Chávez’s rejection of the FTAA. Representing a set of economic and financial policies, the “Washington Consensus”, a phrase coined in 1990, has become synonymous with neoliberal free market capitalism. International financial institutions, and the United States government, extolled the virtues of fiscal austerity, privatization, and market liberalism as the means to alleviate Latin America’s economic sorrows. Neoliberalism is perceived to have failed in Latin America.³⁸ In most cases, the result was extreme social polarization and inequality, further exacerbating class tensions. Chávez is a leading opponent of this kind of economics.

Chávez uses references from renowned figures ranging from religious officials to literary celebrities who have shared even a minimal level of agreement over the negative aspects of this worldview. In a November 2001 speech to the United Nations, he said, “Go to the streets and the cities of Latin America and we will see the results of neoliberal politics, savage, as Pope John Paul II said.”³⁹ In 2003 Chávez told those at an ALADI meeting in Uruguay that they needed to work together to make their own way because there is no future with U.S. and neoliberalism. “I don’t think it’s possible to integrate in the framework of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is disintegrated. It is contrary to the spirit of integration. Its base is in individualism. Its base is in competition, in elitism, in anti-democracy.”⁴⁰ This assertion coincides with the shared political beliefs of the new leftism in Latin America, and has been used as a key reference for promoting ALBA and other regional projects.

Globalization is also a system scorned by Chávez. In relation to his views on neoliberalism, Chávez objects to a kind of globalization which allows foreign powers to exploit a nation's people and resources, and which perpetuates inequality due to uneven access to the global market. To express his distrust of globalism at the Fourth Hemispheric Conference Against the FTAA in Cuba, May 2005, Chávez quoted a famous Uruguayan writer, Ide Augustas, “Globalization is a mask,” he said, “a high-sounding term behind which crouches an evil intention, the old vice of colonialism.” In the same address, he cited Eduardo Galeano, another Uruguayan, to warn of the deceptive promises of economic liberalism, and the injustices it perpetrates: “Never in history have so many been deceived by so few.”⁴¹

Chávez’s diplomacy prioritizes the development of strong personal relationships with Latin American leaders. Several visible new trends in Latin America’s political culture make these alliances quite natural. Chávez’s ethnicity has political consequence. By self-identifying as mestizo, a person of mixed Indigenous, African, and European origin, Chávez represents a marginalized group that makes up approximately 70% of Venezuela’s population. Because of societal prejudice and institutionalized racism, many indigenous people hid their ethnic background in order to avoid stigmatization and designated social place. Recently, however, indigenous peoples have embraced their culture and heritage more openly, and have begun to demand justice, such as improved social conditions and political rights.⁴² This affirmation of indigeniety and subsequent politicization is a very significant movement in Latin America, especially considering that there are some 55 million (or 10%) of people across the southern continent that fall into this ethnic category. This newfound pride is an element of Chávez’s appeal, in which the people accepted Chávez as truly “one of their own.”

The recent politicization of Indigenous peoples also led to the election of the first Indigenous president in modern twentieth century Latin American history, Evo Morales of Bolivia. Elected in January 2005, Morales, an Aymara Indian, shares a racial affinity with 55% of his populace. He has promised to “change the course of history, which for five hundred years has meant injustice and inequality for Indigenous peoples.”⁴³ Chávez immediately extended his political support and personal friendship to Morales; while attending his inauguration ceremony, Chávez commented that Morales was “an emissary

sent by God.”⁴⁴ In a letter to Morales, congratulating him on his election, Chávez said that Bolivians have waited five hundred years to finally have an Aymara Indian as President and this represented, “a real and true historical vindication.”⁴⁵ Chávez’s statements about Morales’ racial makeup accentuate his own claim to indigeniety, which not only carries weight in Venezuela, but throughout Latin America and the world.

In addition to ethnic affinities, Chávez’s social background generates popular support. The fact that Chávez arose from a lower-class background, in a region with little social mobility, has tremendous influence. In Venezuela, the poor have shown their determination in contesting upper-class dominance in political affairs, and since 1998, have become very involved through rallies and protests, exercising voting rights, and participation in grass-roots organization. The election of other presidents from the lower class reaffirms the growing consciousness of these sectors of society all over Latin America.

Evo Morales, again, is a product of this trend. Morales first entered political life as a union organizer for coca farmers against the U.S.-led drug-eradication campaign. Once a coca-farmer himself, Morales is well accustomed to a life of labour and meager rewards. In October 2002, the neighbouring country of Brazil elected Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva. One of eight children to poor parents, Lula knew well the poverty of Brazil’s city slums. The former steel worker and shoeshine boy has a long list of credentials proving his working class heritage.⁴⁶ His background as union organizer and founder of the socialist Worker’s Party aligns closely with Chávez’s socially-oriented Bolivarian Revolution.

Chávez has commended Latin American people for empowering common people to rule, people who understand, and more importantly sympathize with, the reality of their countries, the first step to bringing justice to the region. For example, on the recent reelection of Lula, Chávez said to a Venezuelan audience, “Let’s give Lula a round of applause. We salute and congratulate Brazil’s people for this wise decision to re-elect this great brother, friend, socialist companion and labour leader.”⁴⁷ By endorsing these leaders, Chávez again draws attention to his own background, and cleverly commemorates his own improbable rise while at the same time maintaining a humble and ‘common place’ identity. This triad of “under-class” presidents, Chávez, Morales, and

Lula, represents a clear break from the traditional political elite that has governed Latin America for centuries. Their shared personal experiences make them natural allies, devoted to improving the substandard social conditions which they have experienced firsthand.

Image aside, political values and proscribed ideology also play a role in uniting regional leaders. Latin America is currently undergoing a dramatic political transformation. With a series of upcoming and recently held elections, many of the countries seem poised to adopt a leftist government, abruptly breaking from the neo-liberal political tradition of the previous decades. In country after country in Latin America, voters are choosing governments of the left. Whereas, twenty years ago, Cuba was the only “red” spot of the American map, the present landscape now shows a majority of Latin American countries as “socialist” or “left-leaning.” These leftist leaders, however, are very diverse in their ideological beliefs and political practice. The radical approach is represented by figures like Chávez, Fidel Castro, and Evo Morales, with their strong criticism of the United States and globalization. These leaders favour dramatic governmental restructuring, as well as full or partial nationalization of industries. Adopting a more moderate posture are the so-called “ABC” countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile with presidents Néstor Kirchner, Luiz Ignacio Lula de Silva, and Michelle Bachelet, respectively, as well as Uruguay’s Tabaré Vasquez. The moderates are generally determined to proceed with caution as not to ostracize possible upper-class support or scare off foreign investors. (In fact, some analysts would altogether reject the categorization of Bachelet, or even Lula, as “leftist.”⁴⁸) One thing that is shared among them is a new focus on social development. All declare a mutual desire to address class polarization and the plight of the poor. Another common element is the push for greater sovereignty over their own affairs, which have led many to see the wisdom in strengthening regional economic and political ties. These aspirations are fundamental to Chávez’s movement and, thus many potential allies can be found in these like-minded leaders.

Chávez’s unique political style has greatly advanced Venezuela’s foreign relations, which is focused on these leftist regimes. In a similar manner to the way Chávez has ‘befriended’ his Venezuelan supporters, he also extends a personal

relationship to his Latin American counterparts. His relaxed and down-to-earth style, combined with humility and ardent efforts in diplomacy, have helped build advantageous relationships.

Fidel Castro was one of the first Latin American leaders to welcome Chávez's political arrival. Historically speaking, Castro has been a symbol for an alternative type of governance and a defiant opposition to American hegemony. Chávez's early and open admiration for Castro influenced early projections about his leadership, with journalists and politicians alike immediately painting Chávez as a communist dictator in the making. Chávez's contact with Castro is more than just a cordial relationship between two heads of state – in fact they have become close friends, much to Washington's dismay.

Chávez has publicly stated many times how influential Castro has been in his life; he read Castro's works extensively when imprisoned after the 1992 coup, and Chávez has stated that Castro has served as a moral and ideological influence. Chávez has undoubtedly also been inspired by Castro's oratory skills. Both leaders are renown for their abilities to speak freely, without script, for hours on end, while amazingly still holding the awe-inspired attention of their audience. Chávez says that they chat almost daily; he's somewhere between a brother or a father figure⁴⁹ giving Chávez advice on everything from his physical health and personal security to the country's social welfare programs.⁵⁰

Evo Morales has quickly become a close ally and friend for Chávez, sharing a similar radicalism in image and oratorical style. Anti-imperialism and nationalism characterize his political discourse and policy as well as his passionate rhetoric. Morales turned to Chávez's successful example of regaining control over the country's oil industry as a model for Bolivia's natural gas reserves. In May 2006, Morales reversed the privatization of Bolivia's hydrocarbons, set in place by previous governments, and announced that foreign companies engaged in the Bolivian gas industry would now pay increased royalties on all profits, consequently upsetting Brazil and Spain, its two principal investors.⁵¹

In the current political climate of Latin America, Lula is considered the leading moderate of the leftist trend. Chávez and Lula have demonstrated a mutual desire to build stronger ties between their two countries. In December 2004 on a presidential visit

to Brazil, Chávez told reporters that despite obvious differences, both leaders have the same goal, a goal that he described as turning South America into a power bloc that could bring the world the political balance and peace it so badly needs.⁵² Lula, like Chávez, wants to strengthen the region, but is more cautious about how this should be done. Lula has shown himself to be a strong advocate of Latin American integration, particularly in leading a more “reasoned” campaign of objection to the U.S.’s Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Another staunch ally lies in President Néstor Kirchner of Argentina. This regional leader has a great deal to offer, despite Argentina’s recent economic meltdown in 2001/2. Kirchner’s December 2001 defiant refusal to adhere to the IMF’s demands on debt repayment set the tone of his political posture, demonstrating his boldness of spirit in economic reform. Along with Lula, Kirchner has eagerly played a central role in Latin American resistance to the FTAA. Buenos Aires hosted the Summit of the Americas in November 2005, where Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Uruguay were able to block Bush’s effort to reopen discussion on the issue. Kirchner opened the summit with open disapproval and criticism of U.S. policies in Latin America.⁵³

Building strategic relationships is absolutely crucial to the Bolivarian movement, and has been very successful thus far. As Chávez says, “we have always had friends in the world, but since April 2002, we have millions of friends.”⁵⁴ This is largely a result of Chávez’s active efforts in diplomatic affairs. He has built strong personal relationships with several regional leaders. He is often photographed embracing his Latin American counterparts, or raising their arms in a triumphant cheer. He always speaks fondly of his allies in public speeches and interviews, extending his gratitude for their friendship and political support. In a 2005 interview, Chávez stated, “everyday the position that we defend draws more supporters in the world.” He gave the example of the 2004 World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Cancun, where “before [we] were alone now there are many defending [our] way.”⁵⁵ Chávez’s growing popularity around the world and among international leaders validates this claim.

These positive relationships have not been taken for granted by Chávez. He frequently extols the virtues of his friends. He speaks frequently of Castro in admiration of Cuba’s historic struggle, in gratification for assistance in the Missions, and simply for

Castro's personal camaraderie. He has often come to Castro's defense at international meetings. At the January 2004 Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico, Chávez was furious when Bush, in Castro's absence, launched an attack on the leader. He proudly talks of how he was the only one to defend Cuba and was pleased when "they told me Bush was burning with anger."⁵⁶

While Chávez is unreserved in his criticism of his opponents, he carefully avoids any criticism of his allies. In an interview with German journalist, Niemeyer, Chávez was asked his opinion of Lula and Kirchner's rapprochement in their critical position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵⁷ Chávez's contempt for the IMF is well documented; Chávez considers both the IMF and the World Bank as "most perverse mechanisms"⁵⁸ and "instruments of neoliberalism."⁵⁹ However, Chávez took care to show loyalty to his valued allies, saying, "I can't speak for that, I know only the depths of my own problems in Venezuela, but I do know...that they are friends."⁶⁰ Chávez also defended Lula on the corruption scandal plaguing his government; "I am absolutely certain that Lula is an honest man, a great partner," adding that this controversy is probably due to smear tactics "of the "old political class, of the Brazilian right."⁶¹ One political commentator speculates that Chávez's recent deal with Brazil to buy thirty-six oil tankers for \$3 billion is a timely attempt to bolster Lula's image and help his prospects of being re-elected in October 2006.⁶²

Chávez frequently demonstrates his esteem for regional allies in public address in Venezuela and abroad. This 2002 speech in Caracas is a typical example: After mention of improved relations within Latin America, Chávez cried, "Viva Lula y el Brasil" and enthusiastic echoes of "Viva!" followed. This proceeded with "Viva Kirchner y el Argentina", "Viva el Ecuador and their new president", as well as other thanks given to countries that have extended support and friendship.⁶³

Chávez uses shared ideological views to unify Latin American leadership against U.S. dominance, and has offered some practical incentives to sway traditional economic dependencies. Because of Chávez's impassioned attempts to unite Latin America, with the power of oil resources behind him, the Bolivarian dream is becoming more of a reality. The region seems to be moving toward independent policies and economic integration, as many have rejected the FTAA and endorsed collaborative regional

projects. Chávez and the Bolivarian Movement are partly responsible for these changes. Chávez's innovative plans for Latin American economic and political integration have made significant progress. His radical image and policy, his personal approach to diplomacy, and his compelling rhetoric are important aspects of his success.

¹ Teo Ballvé, "Is Venezuela the New Cuba?" *NACLA Report on the Americas* vol.39 no.1 (July-Aug 2005), 3.

² Chávez, in Nikolas Kozloff, "Oil is a Geopolitical Weapon" *venezuelanalysis.com*, March 29, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1408>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Gregory Wilpert, "Caribbean countries and Venezuela Confirm and Expand Oil Agreements" *venezuelanalysis.com*, September 7, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1749> (November 2005)

The signing countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Dominican Republic, San Cristobal and Nieves, San Vicente and The Grenadines, and Suriname. Jamaica and Cuba did not sign a bilateral agreement with Venezuela at this meeting because they had done so at earlier meetings.

⁵ Critics call this "giving away oil", as support for their notion of Chávez as Castro's puppet.

⁶ Sarah E. Schaffer and Teddy Chestnut, COHA, "Latin America's Rising Star" *venezuelanalysis.com*, August 15, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1522>

⁷ Chávez, interview by Marta Harnecker, *Understanding the Bolivarian Revolution: Hugo Chávez talks to Marta Harnecker*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 122-3.

⁸ Michael Rowan, "Chávez on the Move" *El Universal*. August 2, 2005

⁹ Chávez, interview by Aleida Guevara March, *Chávez, Venezuela, and the New Latin America*, (Melbourne & New York: Ocean Press, 2005), 101.

¹⁰ Michael A. Lebowitz, "Venezuela Confronts the FTAA" *venezuelanalysis.com*, November 21, 2003.

¹¹ "Alternative to Corporate Globalism: Venezuela's ALBA" *Global Exchange* <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/venezuela/VZneoliberalismALBA.pdf#search=%22ALBA%20Venezuela%22> (September 2006)

¹² Teresa Arreaza. "ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean" *venezuelanalysis.com*, January 30, 2004.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/docs.php?dno=1010>

¹³ Mercosur was founded in 1991. In December 2005, Venezuela became a full member (along with Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay). However these negotiations were very slow to develop because of some resistance within the Andean community. Marta, 127.

¹⁴ Chávez, “Speech by President Hugo Chávez at the opening of the XII G-15 Summit” *venezuelanalysis.com*, March 1, 2004. <http://venezuelanalysis.com/docs.php?dno=1011>)

¹⁵ Bernardo Delgado, “Venezuela Withdraws Foreign Reserves from U.S.” *venezuelanalysis.com*, October 1, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1773>

¹⁶ Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*. (London & New York: Verso, 2005), 183.

¹⁷ Chávez, “Lanzamiento del Telesur” Teatro Teresa Carreño in Caracas. July 24, 2005. *Gobiernoenlinea.ve*. (http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/sharedfiles/Lanzamiento_Telesur_24jul2005.pdf)

¹⁸ Harnecker, 127.

¹⁹ Chávez and Vásquez, “Letter of the Presidents Hugo Chávez and Tabaré Vásquez to the Presidents of South America” Montevideo, August 2005. *Diplomacy, Strategy, & Politics* (April/June 2005), 187.

²⁰ Chávez specifically points to their supposed involvement in the 2002 coup, and also the electoral dissention of 2005.

²¹ In an interview with Aleida Guevara, Chávez describes his first experience with the U.S.’ attempt to dictate the policies of his governance: As new president-elect, Chávez embarked upon a world tour to meet with heads of states from around the world, as mentioned earlier. Among the scheduled meetings was U.S. President Bill Clinton followed by Cuban President Fidel Castro. A day before the said meeting in Washington, the president’s liaison telephoned Chávez to notify him that if he proceeded with his plans to meet with Castro, he should understand that it would be “impossible to meet with President Clinton”. With his defiant response, Chávez immediately and firmly set a precedent of rejecting U.S. “council”: “Listen here, Mr. Romero. You’ve got me all wrong. You are talking to the president of an independent country. Do me the favour of never raising this matter with me again.” Chávez in Guevara, 92.

²² Colum Lynch, “Chávez Stirs Things Up at the U.N.: Venezuelan Leader Wins Cheers With Rant Against U.S.” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2005. PA14.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/16/AR2005091601923.html>

²³ Chávez in Guevara, 101. (This story was also told at ALADI meeting in Uruguay, 16 August 2003)

²⁴ Venezuela was labeled “the most volatile country in the world” by the U.S. administration, Condoleezza Rice’s campaign throughout Latin America to pressure distance from Chávez, several U.S. navy ships entered Venezuelan waters unannounced and unexpected: all of these incidents occurred over a few short months in spring 2005, which added weight to Chávez’s warning of American imperialism.

²⁵ R. P. Amudan, “US Planning to Assassinate me: Chávez” *IMC India*, March 5, 2005. <http://india.indymedia.org/en/2005/03/210208.shtml> (One of many similar allegations.)

²⁶ “Meet Chávez – He calls Bush and Blair “a pawn” *Center for Media Alternatives – Quebec*, May 16, 2006. <http://quebec.indymedia.org/en/node/24454> (September 2006)

²⁷ Richard Beeston and Tom Baldwin, “Venezuela’s Chávez on Private Plane to Britain” *The Times (U.K.)*, May 11, 2006. Accessed in *venezuelanalysis.com*.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1962>

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- ²⁸ This program offers oil at a discount of up to 25%. By supplying it directly to a state, the profit added by multinational and private companies is avoided. "Venezuela's President Chávez Offers Cheap Oil to the Poor...of the United States" *Democracy Now Org.*, September 20, 2005. <http://democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/09/20/1330218> Chávez has since extended this offer to other states, and several Central American cities as well. There has even been mention of a similar plan for some European locations.
- ²⁹ Chávez, "Discurso de presidente Hugo Chávez Frías ocasión de la condecoración: Medalla Internacional Complutense" *Diario Vea*, November 22, 2004. (The International Complutense Medal is an award given by the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain to a distinguished individual for their work in "international cooperation." It was awarded to Chávez in November 2004.)
- ³⁰ Chávez, Speech to World Social Forum, Brazil. Translated by venezuelanalysis.com, May 5, 2006. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php/articles.php?artno=1720>
- ³¹ Chávez, Speech to the United Nations, September 15, 2005. Translated by venezuelanalysis.com. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1555>)
- ³² Chávez and Vásquez "Letter of the Presidents Hugo Chávez and Tabaré Vásquez to the Presidents of South America" Montevideo, August 2005. *Diplomacy, Strategy, & Politics*, (April/June 2005), 185.
- ³³ Chávez, "Presidente Chávez: Nunca más seremos colonia extranjera" Maracay, *Informacion*, December 11, 2004, p3
- ³⁴ Chávez in Harnecker, 83, and Guevara, 20.
- ³⁵ Chávez, interview by Ralph T. Niemeyer, *Under Attack: Morning Dawn in Venezuela*. (New York, iUniverse, 2005), 94.
- ³⁶ Gott, 183.
- ³⁷ Chávez in Harnecker, 113.
- ³⁸ Duncan Green, *The Silent Revolution: The Rise and Crisis of Market Economics in Latin America*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003) Although the conventional wisdom during the 1990s was neoliberalism, the new model yielded very meager rewards. In Green's introduction, he says, "By the early years of the new century, the UN was talking of a new 'lost half-decade' (1997-2002), a return to the slump of the 1980s." p15.
- ³⁹ Chávez, "Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas O.N.U." November 12, 2001. http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/sharedfiles/Asamblea_General_ONU_12nov2001.pdf
- ⁴⁰ Chávez, "Sesión Extraordinaria de la asociación latinoamericana de integración (ALADI)" Montevideo, Uruguay, August 16, 2003, *gobierno en linea*. http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/sharedfiles/Sesion_Extraordinaria_ALADI_16ago2003.)
- ⁴¹ Chávez in Michael Keefer, "Hugo Chávez Frías and the Sense of History" venezuelanalysis.com, May 3, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1437>
- ⁴² Several examples attest to this. From 2000-2005, the Indigenous peoples in Bolivia mobilized in protest many times to prevent unfavourable legislation regarding natural resources, to draw attention to social injustice, and even to remove unwanted leadership. In Ecuador as well the indigenous movement made many strides from 1998-2004, forcing

out two presidents and actively participating in politics. These are just a few examples of the resurgence of Indigenous peoples in Latin America.

⁴³ “Bolivia’s New Leader Vows Change” *BBC News*, January 22, 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4636190.stm> (March 2006)

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Chávez Welcomes Morales’ Victory in Bolivia.” *venezuelanalysis.com*, December 21, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1852>

⁴⁶ “President: Biography” *Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil*.

<http://www.presidencia.gov.br/ingles/president/>

⁴⁷ “Venezuela’s Chavez congratulates Brazil’s Silva on re-election victory” *The*

Associated Press, October 30, 2006

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/30/america/LA_GEN_Venezuela_Brazil_Elections.php (Dec. 2006)

⁴⁸ Lula has been called “a friend of the bankers and investors”, and criticized on his slow progress in meeting several election promises. One article revealing this point of view is: Henry Chu, “Brazil’s Leftists No Long See Lula as Their Champion” *New York Times*, January 26, 2005. Bachelet is a member of the Socialist Party, which is part of the ruling “Coalition of Parties for Democracy.” This coalition joins together many centrist parties, and therefore has taken a very moderate, central position in economic affairs. In one commentary on Latin America’s new leftism, the author says that many observers thought, or hoped, “that the aggiornamento of the left in Latin America would rapidly and neatly follow that of socialist parties in France and Spain and of New Labour in the United Kingdom. In a few cases, this occurred -- Chile certainly, Brazil tenuously. But in many others, it did not.” Jorge G. Castaneda, “Latin America’s Left Turn” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2006) <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060501faessay85302-p10/jorge-g-castaneda/latin-america-s-left-turn.html>

⁴⁹ Chávez in Niemeyer, 94. Chávez was so touched by Castro’s words in a letter, that he wrote back, saying, “From now on, I don’t know whether to call you brother or father.” In other interviews, Chávez has reiterated this sentiment. (see Guevara, 95)

⁵⁰ Chávez in Guevara, 88-9

⁵¹ Associated Press, “Bolivia Nationalizes Natural Gas Industry” May 2, 2006. Accessed in *CTV.ca*.

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060501/bolivia_gas_060501/20060501?hub=World (May 2006)

⁵² Iain Bruce, “Lula and Chávez Push Closer Ties” *BBC.com*, September 16, 2004.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3659818.stm>

⁵³ Frederico Fuentes, “A President, A Soccer Player, and the Dreams of Millions”

venezuelanalysis.com, November 13, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1601> At the Summit, massive demonstrations were held to demonstrate public opposition to Washington’s proposed plan.

⁵⁴ Chávez, “Speech at the Popular Demonstration in Caracas”, January 23, 2003. *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela: The Life of the Homeland is at stake here: speeches and addresses Dec.2002-Jan.2003*. (Havana: Ediciones Plaza, 2003), 265.

⁵⁵ Chávez in Niemeyer, 87.

⁵⁶ Chávez in Guevara, 93.

⁵⁷ Both countries have voiced criticism of the organization and their policies, and have recently had tough negotiations with the IMF over debt repayment agreements. Argentina's debt default in 2002 lead Kirchner to refuse payments altogether, until a later deal was made with dramatically lowered rates and longer terms. Brazil was also determined to refuse more money from the IMF. In December 2005, Argentina and Brazil both announced plans to pay their debt in full.

⁵⁸ "Chávez arremete en la Complutense contra EEUU y el neoliberalismo." *Asociación Cultura Paz y Solidaridad Haydée Santamaría*, November 22, 2004.

http://www.nodo50.org/haydeesantamaria/docs_ajenos/Chavez_a22112004.htm

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⁵⁹ "Resulta Chávez en España colaboración cubana" *cubaminrex.cu*

<http://www.cubaminrex.cu/Actualidad/2004/Resalta%20Ch%E1vez%20en%20Espa%F1a%20colaboraci%F3n%20cubana.htm> (September 2006)

⁶⁰ Chávez in Niemeyer, 87.

⁶¹ Chávez in "Venezuela's Chávez Strengthen Cooperation in Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil" *venezuelanalysis.com*, August 12, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1714>

⁶² Greg Grandin, *The Nation*, "Latin America's New Consensus" *venezuelanalysis.com*, April 19, 2006. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1709>

⁶³ Chávez, "Speech at the Popular Demonstration in Caracas", January 23, 2003. *The Fascist Coup against Venezuela: The Life of the Homeland is at stake here: speeches and addresses Dec.2002-Jan.2003*. P267.

CONCLUSION

Hugo Chávez has been remarkably successful, owing to the support given by two groups: the Venezuelan majority, who by their faith have entrusted Chávez with the resources of oil-rich Venezuela and empowered him to revolutionize the country's social, economic and political structure; and the Latin American community, specifically the leaders of allied nations, who have supported Chávez's international initiatives through increased regional trade, cooperative programming, and political solidarity.

Chávez's unique style, which can be classified as populist, is a major factor in explaining his success. In his political career, Chávez has met all the requirements of the populist definition. He has exhibited remarkable charisma and personalist appeal with almost unmatched skills in oration. His vague Bolivarian ideology largely centers upon the creation of an enemy, using categories of "us" and "them" to legitimize political actions. Because of the latter, Chávez's loyal following - made up of mostly the poor, but also includes support from some of the military - has mobilized frequently in the streets of Venezuela. Chávez has also dismantled formal political institutions, another populist characteristic. In fact, one of the reasons he was elected was because of his promise to radically reform the Venezuelan political system. Party structures are also lacking, as Chávez's MVR remains a loose alliance of various party banners, and the grassroots Bolivarian Circles have developed as an alternative to traditional party organizations. Economically, the proposed trade agreement, ALBA, the oil enterprise, PetroAmerica, and Chávez's opposition to neoliberalism and capitalism are all based in classical populist principles of wealth redistribution and the social responsibility of government.

The poor sectors of Venezuela have embraced Chávez as more than simply the nation's president, but as an extraordinary leader of historic magnitude and also as a personal friend to many. *Chavistas* have demonstrated their love and their loyalty time and time again. Most recently, on December 3, 2006, Chávez was re-elected for a third time¹ with 63% of the popular vote. With so many elections and demonstrations, Chávez's popularity in Venezuela is indisputable. Chávez's bold political ideas, and the policies instituted out of them, have proven his sincerity and reliability in the eyes of his supporters. As part of Chávez's discourse, history plays a prominent role. References to

Venezuela's political and economic past draw upon the people's experience and reshape their understanding of the way history instructs on the present, making the Bolivarian cause all the more worthy. Most notably, the threat of the Venezuelan oligarchy and the U.S. imperialists incite the people to support efforts to protect their political sovereignty and economic resources. But, this alone would not produce the kind of fierce loyalty Chávez enjoys from many Venezuelans. An important element is his very personable style. His interaction with the public is natural, amiable, and frequent, causing some people to feel an intimate bond with their president. Chávez's unique style and image have captured the allegiance of the Venezuelan majority. His ethnicity and social upbringing have granted him a degree of instant approval among the poor.

Bolivarianism is much more than simply a Venezuelan project. Its scope is also international. The impact of Chávez and his vision have had tremendous influence on South America. A great amount of energy has been dedicated to developing stronger relations among Latin American countries, and the effects can be clearly seen in economic partnerships and new political alliances.

Chávez's radicalism is appealing to many because it represents a break from the past, which has been negatively tainted by dictatorships, political interference, economic hardships, etc. A wind of change is blowing throughout Latin America. The new left is on the rise, and the indigenous communities have found their voices in newly elected leaders of their own ethnicity. A radical shifting of loyalties is evident in new industrial or infrastructural projects, media ventures, increased trade, and intergovernmental meetings and organizations.

Chávez has been a key figure in all of this. Harsh criticism of U.S. policy and warnings of encroachment and interference touched upon underlying resentments and strikes a chord with many Latin American leaders and citizens alike. Whether or not they choose to defy the U.S. in the way Chávez does, Chávez's fierce anti-Americanism has been effective in international relations. Chávez's rhetoric has gathered quite a following worldwide, and in it, historical references and support from other world figures are prominently featured. Also, personable and charismatic diplomacy by Chávez has resulted in several strong alliances with other regional leaders as well as several intimate friendships. Chávez's loyalty to his allies has been apparent in many instances. The

heightened profile of Venezuela in Latin American affairs, and the many agreements signed between Venezuela and other South American nations are a measure of Chávez's success.

Over the past few years, critics and admirers alike have anxiously awaited Chávez's next move, and both scholars and reporters have attempted to assess his place in Venezuelan and Latin American politics. In this study, I have tried to situate Chávez in the historical framework of populism in Latin America. I have also drawn out key elements of his political style and public image to help explain his appeal. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to a better understanding of this complex and influential leader.

¹ Chávez's first term was 1999-2000. The new Constitution, passed in July 1999, expanded the length of the presidential term to six years instead of four. A presidential election was then called, which Chávez won, giving him a mandate to serve from 2000 to 2006.

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