

Chapter 1

Land and People

When Europeans first encountered the New World, they found a land unlike any they had ever seen. It was a lush tropical wonder, colored by brilliant plants and animals. Amerigo Vespucci marveled, “Sometimes I was so wonder-struck by the fragrant smells of the herbs and flowers and the savor of the fruits and the roots that I fancied myself near the Terrestrial Paradise.”

But the images of an earthly paradise would fade over time. By the nineteenth century, Latin America would be considered “backward.” In the twentieth century, the region would be described as “underdeveloped,” “Third World,” or simply “impoverished.” In the twenty-first century, Latin America is the region of greatest inequality in the world.

What happened to the Garden of Eden? E. Bradford Burns, the original author of this textbook, in 1972 called the problem the enigma: “Poor people inhabit rich lands.” And although in the ensuing years those lands have been exploited and subjected to substantial environmental degradation, they are still rich – and the majority of the people still poor.

Latin America has moved from paradise to poverty thanks to historical patterns that have developed over the years. This book will explore those patterns in an attempt to understand why the Latin America of the twenty-first century is still wrestling with issues it has faced throughout its history. We argue that the most destructive pattern has been the continuing tendency of the elites of the region to confuse their nations’ well-being with their own. Earlier scholars, however, placed the blame on the region’s climate, on racist characterizations of the population, and on the size of the population.

THE LAND

In the 1490s, Christopher Columbus tried to convince himself, and his disbelieving crew, that the island of Cuba was actually a peninsula of China. In reality, they had stumbled upon the unexpected: a region of such vastness and variety that even today not all of the territory is controlled by the people who have so desperately tried to do so. It has been a land of both opportunity and disaster. Geography is destiny until one has the technology to surmount it. The geography of Latin America has contributed to the region's economic organization and created challenges for settlement and state building.

The original territory claimed by the kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula included all of Central and South America, modern Mexico, many of the islands off the coasts, as well as much of what is now the United States. Contemporary Latin America is a huge region of a continent and a half, stretching 7,600 miles southward from the Rio Grande to Cape Horn. Geopolitically the region today encompasses eighteen Spanish-speaking republics, Portuguese-speaking Brazil, and French-speaking Haiti, a total of approximately eight million square miles.

It is a region of geographic extremes. The Andes, the highest continuous mountain barrier on earth, runs 4,400 miles and has at least three dozen peaks that are taller than Mt. McKinley. The Amazon River has the greatest discharge volume, drainage basin, and length of navigable waterways on the planet. Yet Latin America also has the driest region on earth, the Atacama Desert. Half of Latin America is forested, comprising one-quarter of the world's total forest area, and leading to its description as the lungs of the world.

In the United States press, Latin America often seems a tragic victim of its climate, rocked by frequent earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, punishing hurricanes, and deadly avalanches. Indeed, Latin America has more than its share of natural disasters, a result of sitting

atop five active tectonic plates – Caribbean, Cocos, Nazca, Scotia, and South American. In addition, part of South America’s Pacific coast lies along the “ring of fire,” the Pacific region where 80 percent of the seismic and volcanic activity of the earth takes place. That we seem to know so much about these events, however, says more about the limited portrayal of the region in our media than it does about the frequency of climatic violence.

But climate has long been a factor in foreign views of the region. Most of Latin America lies within the tropics, which prompted Europeans to speculate that the hot, steamy climate made people lazy. It is true that a generous nature provided natural abundance that made it possible for subsistence farmers to support themselves, with no incentive to work on European-owned enterprises. As many Latin Americans gradually lost access to the best lands and were forced to eke out a living on poor soils, or to work on the large landholdings of elites, it became clear that the climate was no drawback to hard work.

Latin America has only one country, Uruguay, with no territory in the tropics. South America reaches its widest point, 3,200 miles, just a few degrees south of the equator, unlike North America, which narrows rapidly as it approaches the equator. However, the cold Pacific Ocean currents refresh much of the west coast of Latin America, and the altitudes of the mountains and highlands offer a wide range of temperatures that belie the latitude. For centuries, and certainly long before the Europeans arrived, many of the region’s most advanced civilizations flourished in the mountain plateaus and valleys. Today many of Latin America’s largest cities are in the mountains or on mountain plateaus: Mexico City, Guatemala City, Bogotá, Quito, La Paz, and São Paulo, to mention only a few. Much of Latin America’s population, particularly in Middle America and along the west coast of South America, concentrates in the highland areas.

In Mexico and Central America, the highlands create a rugged backbone that runs through the center of most of the countries, leaving coastal plains on either side. Part of that mountain system emerges in the Greater Antilles to shape the geography of the major Caribbean islands. In South America, unlike Middle America, the mountains closely rim the Pacific coast, while the highlands skirt much of the Atlantic coast, making penetration into the flatter interior of the continent difficult. The Andes predominate. The world's longest continuous mountain barrier, it runs 4,400 miles down the west coast and fluctuates in width between 100 and 400 miles. Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the hemisphere, rises to a majestic 22,834 feet along the Chilean-Argentine frontier. The formidable Andes have been a severe obstacle to exploration and settlement of the South American interior from the west. Along the east coast, the older Guiana and Brazilian Highlands average 2,600 feet in altitude and rarely reach 9,000 feet. Running southward from the Caribbean and frequently fronting on the ocean, they disappear in the extreme south of Brazil. Like the Andes, they too have inhibited penetration of the interior. The largest cities on the Atlantic side are all on the coast or, like São Paulo, within a very short distance of the ocean.

Four major river networks, the Magdalena, Orinoco, Amazon, and La Plata, flow into the Caribbean or Atlantic, providing an access into the interior that is missing on the west coast. The Amazon ranks as one of the world's most impressive river systems. Aptly referred to in Portuguese as the "riversea," it is the largest river in volume in the world, exceeding that of the Mississippi by fourteen times. In places it is impossible to see from shore to shore, and over much of its course the river averages 100 feet in depth. Running eastward from its source 18,000 feet up in the Andes, it is joined from both the north and south by more than 200 tributaries. Together this imposing river and its tributaries provide 25,000 miles of navigable water. Farther

to the south, the Plata network flows through some of the world's richest soil, the Pampas, a vast flat area shared by Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. The river system includes the Uruguay, Paraguay, and Paraná rivers, but it gets its name from the Río de la Plata, an 80-mile-long estuary separating Uruguay and the Argentine province of Buenos Aires. The system drains a basin of more than 1.5 million square miles. Shallow in depth, it still provides a vital communication and transportation link between the Atlantic coast and the southern interior of the continent.

No single country better illustrates the kaleidoscopic variety of Latin American geography than Chile, that long, lean land clinging to the Pacific shore for 2,600 miles. One of the world's bleakest and most forbidding deserts in the north, the Atacama, gives way to rugged mountains with forests and alpine pastures. The Central Valley combines a Mediterranean climate with fertile plains, the heartland of Chile's agriculture and population. Moving southward, the traveler encounters dense, mixed forests, heavy rainfall, and a cold climate, a warning of the glaciers and rugged coasts that lie beyond. Snow permanently covers much of Tierra del Fuego.

Yet, even with Chile's extremes from the desert to the snow, geographical differences are even wider in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, which alone encompasses eighty-four of the 104 ecological regions in the world and twenty-eight different climates. In fact, Latin America is the most geographically diverse area in the world. It includes seven distinct geographical zones: border, tropical highlands, lowland Pacific coast, lowland Atlantic coast, Amazon, highland and dry Southern Cone, and the temperate Southern Cone.

The U.S.-Mexico border is an area of arid or temperate climate, low population, and is the only place in the world where rich and poor countries abut. Because it is home to the

manufacturing assembly industry (*maquiladora*), the region has a higher gross domestic product than the rest of Latin America. To its south, the tropical highlands include the highlands of Central America and the Andean countries north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Access to the coast of this region is difficult, yet it is also an area of high population density, including most of the indigenous population of Latin America. Because of poor soil and high population, this is the poorest area in Latin America – even though the region includes the relatively high-income areas of Mexico City and Bogotá.

The lowland Pacific and Atlantic coasts are both tropical, although both have small dry areas. While the highest population density of all Latin America is found on the Pacific coast, the Atlantic coast also has a large population. The income of the regions is about 20 percent higher than the tropical highlands, partly because of their advantageous position for international trade. But the lowlands are also areas that are prone to disease, and tropical soils present problems for successful agriculture.

The Amazon zone has the lowest population density of Latin America. It boasts a higher gross domestic product than neighboring areas because absentee owners earn high rents from mining and from large plantations. These economic activities are taking a toll on the delicate ecology of the area. The dry Southern Cone has only a slightly higher population than the Amazon, but there is a high population density in the temperate Southern Cone. Both are high-income areas.

Latin Americans have always been aware of the significance of their environment. Visiting the harsh, arid interior of Northeastern Brazil for the first time, Euclides da Cunha marveled in his *Rebellion in the Backlands (Os Sertões, 1902)* at how the land had shaped a different people and created a civilization that contrasted sharply with that of the coast:

Here was an absolute and radical break between the coastal cities and the clay huts of the interior, one that so disturbed the rhythm of our evolutionary development and which was so deplorable a stumbling block to national unity. They were in a strange country now, with other customs, other scenes, a different kind of people. Another language even, spoken with an original and picturesque drawl. They had, precisely, the feelings of going to war in another land. They felt that they were outside Brazil.

The variety of environment within countries has also been a trope in literature. Gabriel García Márquez grew up in Aracataca, the model for the fictional Macondo, a lush, steamy tropical zone. At fourteen, when he first went to Bogotá, he described it as “a remote and mournful city, where a cold drizzle had been falling since the beginning of the sixteenth century.” He uses similar language in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to describe Bogotá’s effects on Fernanda del Carpio: “Fernanda was a woman lost in the world. She had been born and raised in a city six hundred miles away [from Macondo], a gloomy city where on ghostly nights the coaches of the viceroys still rattled down cobbled streets.”

Latin American films, too, often assign nature the role of a major protagonist. Certainly in the Argentine classic *Prisoners of the Earth* (*Prisioneros de la Tierra*, 1939), the forests and rivers of the northeast overpower the outsider. Nature even forces the local people to bend before her rather than conquer her. A schoolteacher exiled by a military dictatorship to the geographically remote and rugged Chilean south in the Chilean film *The Frontier* (*La Frontera*, 1991) quickly learns that the ocean, mountains, and elements dominate and shape the lives of the inhabitants. Nature thus enforces some characteristics on the people of Latin America. The towering Andes, the vast Amazon, the unbroken Pampas, the lush rain forests provide an

impressive setting for an equally powerful human drama.

The numbers of humans in that drama has been an issue of great concern, especially in the context of Latin American development. In the 1960s, Latin America's annual birthrate of 2.8 percent made it the most rapidly growing area in the world. By the end of the twentieth century, the region's population growth had slowed to a low of 1.6 percent, closer to the world average of 1.5 percent. Half of that population is either Brazilian or Mexican. Despite concerns in the more developed world about Latin American population growth, the region is relatively underpopulated, with the exception of overcrowded El Salvador and Haiti. More than twice the size of Europe, the area contains less population than Europe. It occupies 15 percent of the world's land mass but contains only 9 percent of the world's population. That population has its roots in the people who came to the region from Asia, Europe, and Africa.

THE INDIGENOUS

Some 30,000 years ago, when there still existed a land bridge between Asia and North America, migrants crossed the Bering Strait in pursuit of game animals. Moving slowly southward, they dispersed throughout North and South America. Over the millennia, at an uneven rate, some advanced through hunting and fishing cultures to take up agriculture. At the same time they fragmented into many cultural and linguistic groups, with up to 2,200 different languages, although they maintained certain general physical features in common: straight black hair, dark eyes, copper-colored skin, and short stature.

The indigenous groups can best be understood by grouping them as non-sedentary, semi-sedentary, and sedentary societies. Non-sedentary societies were gathering and hunting groups that followed a seasonal cycle of moving through a delimited territory in search of food; they were found mostly in what is now the northern Mexico frontier, the Argentine pampas and the

interior of Brazil. In semi-sedentary societies, hunting was still important, but they had also developed slash-and-burn agriculture, which shifted sites within their region. They populated much of Latin America and were often found on the fringes of fully sedentary peoples. Fully sedentary peoples had settled communities based on intensive agriculture, which provided enough of a surplus to support a hierarchical society with specialized classes. They were found in central Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The most advanced of these groups founded the impressive imperial societies.

Varied as the early American cultures were, a majority of them shared enough traits to permit a few generalizations. Family or clan units served as the basic social organization. All displayed a profound faith in supernatural forces that they believed shaped, influenced, and guided their lives. For that reason, the *shamans*, those intimate with the supernatural, played important roles. They provided the contact between the mortal and the immortal, between the human and the spirit, and served as healers. In the more complex and highly stratified societies, there was a differentiation between the more extensive landholdings of the nobility and that of the commoners. But in all indigenous societies, land was provided to everyone on the basis of membership in the community. Game roamed and ate off the land. Further, the land furnished fruits, berries, nuts, and roots. Tilling the soil produced other foods, corn and potatoes, for example. Many artifacts, instruments, and implements were similar from Alaska to Cape Horn. For example, spears, bows and arrows, and clubs were the common weapons of warfare or for the hunt. Although these similarities are significant, the differences among the many cultures were enormous and impressive. By the end of the fifteenth century, between nine million and 100 million people inhabited the Western Hemisphere. Scholars still heatedly debate the figures, and one can find forceful arguments favoring each extreme.

Mistaking the New World for Asia, Christopher Columbus called the inhabitants he met “Indians.” Exploration later indicated that the “Indians” belonged to myriad cultural groups, none of whom had a word that in any way groups together all the indigenous people of the New World. They were as differentiated as the ancestral tribes of Europe, and their identities were locally based. The most important indigenous groups were the Aztecs and Mayas of Mexico and Central America; the Carib and Arawak of the Caribbean area; the Chibcha of Columbia; the Inca of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia; the Araucanian of Chile; the Guaraní of Paraguay; and the Tupí of Brazil. Of these, the Aztec, Maya, and Inca exemplify the most complex cultural achievements, with fully sedentary and imperial societies.

Two distinct periods, the Classic and the Late, mark the history of Mayan civilization. During the Classic period, from the fourth to the tenth centuries, the Mayas lived in Guatemala; then they suddenly migrated to Yucatan, beginning the Late period, which lasted until the Spanish conquest. The exodus baffles anthropologists, who most often suggest that the exhaustion of the soil in Guatemala limited the corn harvests and forced the Mayas to move in order to survive. Corn provided the basis for the Mayan civilization, and the Mayan account of creation revolves around corn. The gods “began to talk about the creation and the making of our first mother and father; of yellow corn and of white corn they made their flesh; of cornmeal dough they made the arms and the legs of man,” relates the *Popul Vuh*, the sacred book of the Mayas. All human activity, all religion, centered on the planting, growing, and harvesting of corn. The Mayas dug an extensive network of canals and water-control ditches, which made intensive agriculture possible. These efficient agricultural methods produced corn surpluses and hence the leisure for a large priestly class to dedicate its talents to religion and scientific study.

Extraordinary intellectual achievements resulted. The Mayas progressed from the

pictograph to the ideograph and thus invented a type of writing, the only Indians in the hemisphere to do so. Sophisticated in mathematics, they invented the zero and devised numeration by position. Astute observers of the heavens, they applied their mathematical skills to astronomy. Their careful studies of the heavens enabled them to predict eclipses, follow the path of the planet Venus, and prepare a calendar more accurate than that used in Europe. As the ruins of Copán, Tikal, Palenque, Chichén Itzá, Mayapán, and Uxmal testify, the Mayas built magnificent temples. One of the most striking features of that architecture is its extremely elaborate carving and sculpture.

To the west of the Mayas, another native civilization, the Aztecs, expanded and flourished in the fifteenth century. The Aztec empire had its origins in the Mexica, a group that had migrated from the north in the early thirteenth century into the central valley of Mexico, where they conquered several prosperous and highly advanced city-states. In 1325, they founded Tenochtitlán, their island capital, and from that religious and political center they radiated outward to absorb other cultures until they controlled all of Central Mexico. Their highly productive system of agriculture included the *chinampas*, floating gardens that made effective use of their lake location. Constant conquests gave prominence to the warriors, and, not surprisingly, among the multiple divinities the god of war and the sun predominated. To propitiate him, as well as other gods, required human sacrifices. The Aztecs devised the pictograph, an accurate calendar, an impressive architecture, and an elaborate and effective system of government.

Largest, oldest, and best organized of the Indian civilizations was the Incan, which flowered in the harsh environment of the Andes. By the early sixteenth century, the empire extended in all directions from Cuzco, regarded as the center of the universe. It stretched nearly

3,000 miles from Ecuador into Chile, and its maximum width measured 400 miles. Few empires have been more rigidly regimented or more highly centralized, a real miracle when one realizes that it was run without the benefit—or hindrance—of written accounts or records. The only accounting system was the *quipu*, cords upon which knots were made to indicate specific mathematical units. Scholars now believe the Incas wove a verbal code into the threads. Spanish chroniclers attested that the cords were used not just to record such mathematical data as censuses, inventories, and tribute records, but also for royal chronicles, records of sacred places and sacrifices, successions, postal messages, and criminal trials. The highly effective government rapidly assimilated newly conquered peoples into the empire. Entire populations were moved around the empire when security suggested the wisdom of such relocations. Every subject was required to speak Quechua, the language of the court. In weaving, pottery, medicine, and agriculture, the achievements of the Incans were magnificent. Challenged by a stingy soil, they developed systems of drainage, terracing, and irrigation and learned the value of fertilizing their fields. They produced impressive food surpluses, stored by the state for lean years.

Many differences separated these three high Indian civilizations, but at the same time some impressive similarities existed. Society was highly structured. The hierarchy of nobles, priests, warriors, artisans, farmers, and slaves was ordinarily inflexible, although occasionally some mobility did occur. At the pinnacle of that hierarchy stood the omnipotent emperor, the object of the greatest respect and veneration. The sixteenth-century chronicler Pedro de Cieza de León, in his own charming style, illustrated the awe in which the people held the Inca: “Thus the kings were so feared that, when they traveled over the provinces, and permitted a piece of the cloth to be raised which hung round their litter, so as to allow their vassals to behold them, there was such an outcry that the birds fell from the upper air where they were flying, insomuch that

they could be caught in men's hands. All men so feared the king, that they did not dare to speak evil of his shadow.”

Little or no distinction existed between civil and religious authority, so that for all intents and purposes Church and State were one. The Incan and Aztec emperors both were regarded as representatives of the sun on earth and thus as deities, a position probably held by the rulers of the Mayan city-states as well. Royal judges impartially administered the laws of the empires and apparently enjoyed a reputation for fairness. The sixteenth-century chroniclers who saw the judicial systems functioning invariably praised them. Cieza de León, for one, noted, “It was felt to be certain that those who did evil would receive punishment without fail and that neither prayers nor bribes would avert it.”

These civilizations rested on a firm rural base. Cities were rare, although a few existed with populations exceeding 100,000. They were centers of commerce, government, and religion. Eyewitness accounts as well as the ruins that remain leave no doubt that these cities were well-organized and contained impressive architecture. The sixteenth-century chronicles reveal that the cities astonished the first Spaniards who saw them. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Hernando Cortés into Tenochtitlán in 1519, gasped, “And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico [City], we were astounded. These great towns and cities and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not a dream!”

The productivity of the land made possible an opulent court life and complex religious ceremonies. The vast majority of the population, however, worked in agriculture. The farmers grew corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, manioc root, and potatoes, as well as other crops.

Communal lands were cultivated for the benefit of the state, religion, and community. The state thoroughly organized and directed the rural labor force. Advanced as these native civilizations were, however, not one developed the use of iron or used the wheel, since they lacked draft animals to pull wheeled vehicles. However, the indigenous had learned to work gold, silver, copper, tin, and bronze. Artifacts that have survived in those metals testify to fine skills.

There is some disagreement among scholars about the roles that women played in these societies. In both the Inca and Aztec worlds, women primarily bore responsibility for domestic duties. The roles were so clearly defined among the Mexica that when a child was born, the midwife would give a girl a spindle, weaving shuttles and a broom, while a boy would be given a shield and arrows. Many scholars now contend that these roles were different but not necessarily unequal; instead, they see gender complementarity, in which men and women formed equally important halves of the social order. For example, home was a sacred place, and ritual sweeping was related to religious practices. Childbirth was considered akin to battle; as one Nahuatl account described it, "Is this not a fatal time for us poor women? This is our kind of war."

In the Aztec empire, women also sold goods in the markets, where they often had supervisory positions; they were cloth makers and embroiderers, and served as midwives. In Inca society, women took care of the home, but also worked in agriculture. Their work tended to be seen not as private service for husbands but as a continuation of household and community. Here there was complementarity as well: men plowed, women sowed, and both harvested.

While in Central Mexico, Mexica women could not hold high political office, this was not the case at the fringes of the empire. Mixtec women inherited dynastic titles and frequently served as rulers. The same was true on the fringes of the Inca empire, for example, in the highlands of Ecuador. However, the complementary social positions and occasional positions of

power do not imply political equality. In both empires, men held the highest positions of power.

The spectacular achievements of these sedentary farming cultures contrast sharply with the more elementary evolution of the gathering, hunting, and fishing cultures and semi-sedentary farming cultures among the Latin American indigenous populations. The Tupí tribes, the single most important native element contributing to the early formation of Brazil, illustrate the status of the many intermediate farming cultures found throughout Latin America.

The Tupí tribes tended to be very loosely organized. The small, temporary villages, often surrounded by a crude wooden stockade, were, when possible, located along a river bank. The Indians lived communally in large thatched huts in which they strung their hammocks in extended family or lineage groups of as many as 100 people. Most of the tribes had at least a nominal chief, although some seemed to recognize a leader only in time of war and a few seemed to have no concept of a leader. More often than not, the *shaman* was the most important and powerful tribal figure. He communed with the spirits, proffered advice, and prescribed medicines. The religions abounded with good and evil spirits.

The men spent considerable time preparing for and participating in tribal wars. They hunted monkeys, tapirs, armadillos, and birds. They also fished, trapping the fish with funnel-shaped baskets, poisoning the water and collecting the fish, or shooting the fish with arrows. They cleared away the forest to plant crops. Nearly every year during the dry season, the men cut down trees, bushes, and vines, waited until they had dried, and then burned them, a method used throughout Latin America, then as well as now. The burning destroyed the thin humus and the soil was quickly exhausted. Hence, it was constantly necessary to clear new land and eventually the village moved in order to be near virgin soil. In general, although not exclusively, the women took charge of planting and harvesting crops and of collecting and

preparing the food. Manioc was the principal cultivated crop. Maize, beans, yams, peppers, squash, sweet potatoes, tobacco, pineapples, and occasionally cotton were the other cultivated crops. Forest fruits were collected.

To the first Europeans who observed them, these Indians seemed to live an idyllic life. The tropics required little or no clothing. Generally nude, the Tupí developed the art of body ornamentation and painted elaborate and ornate geometric designs on themselves. Into their noses, lips, and ears they inserted stone and wooden artifacts. Feathers from the colorful forest birds provided an additional decorative touch. Their appearance prompted the Europeans to think of them as innocent children of nature. The first chronicler of Brazil, Pero Vaz de Caminha, marveled to the king of Portugal, “Sire, the innocence of Adam himself was not greater than these people’s.” As competition for land and resources increased, chroniclers would later tell quite a different tale, one in which the “Indians” emerged as wicked villains, brutes who desperately needed the civilizing hand of Europe.

The European romantics who thought they saw a utopia in native life obviously exaggerated. The indigenous by no means had led the perfect life. Misunderstanding, if not outright ignorance, has always characterized outsiders’ perceptions of them. Far too often since the conquest, images of native peoples have erred at either extreme—the violent savage or the noble savage—rather than showing their humanity. It is through their own words that the indigenous can be seen as more fully human, as in this Nahuatl lament over the conquest: “Broken spears lie in the roads; we have torn our hair in our grief....We have pounded our hands in despair against the adobe walls, for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead.”

THE EUROPEAN

The Europeans who came to dominate Latin America came primarily from the Iberian

peninsula, a land of as much contrast as the New World. Almost an island, the peninsula is bounded by the Bay of Biscay, Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Cádiz, and the Mediterranean Sea. Half of its territory comprises arid tableland. But this *meseta* is bisected by one imposing mountain system – the Sierra da Estrela, Sierra de Gredos, and Sierra de Guadarrama – and circled by another – the Cantabrian Cordillera, Ibera mountains and Sierra Morena, and Cordillera Bética. Spain is divided by the Pyrenees from the rest of Europe, and separated from Africa only by the Straits of Gibraltar. The varied climate ranges from the cold winters of the north to the subtropical sunshine of the south.

The region was also the crossroads of many peoples—Iberians, Celts, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths, and Muslims—and these cultures blended together. The most stable periods in this varied history were under Roman rule, from about 19 BCE to the late fifth century, which was followed by rule by the Visigoths, who continued many Roman customs, during the sixth and seventh centuries. The Visigoths fell to the Muslims in the invasion of 711-720, which prompted similar laments to those of the Mexica: “Who can bear to relate such perils? Who can count such terrible disasters? Even if every limb were transformed into a tongue, it would be beyond human capability to describe the ruin of Spain and its many and great evils.”

Muslim control of the peninsula was never complete, and even its dominance of the south waxed and waned, due in part to divisions within the Muslim community between Berbers and Arabs. Furthermore, although many Christians converted to Islam, the majority of the rural population was still Christian as late as 948, when Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal visited. In addition, Christian groups in the north continued to resist the Muslim forces. The Umayyad caliphate was successful at slowly conquering and ruling much of the south of Spain, raising

Córdoba to a cultural center, and ruling from 929 to 1031. Two subsequent caliphates, the Almoravid, a Berber group from North Africa (1086-1147), and the Almohad (1146-1220s), were able to maintain unity in al-Andalus, as the Muslims called their Iberian territories. But by the thirteenth century, the Christian groups from the north of the peninsula had gained strength. The crusade to retake the peninsula had begun in 732 at the Battle of Tours, and it would take until 1492, when Granada fell, to expel the Muslims from the peninsula.

Throughout the years of Muslim rule, Iberia was a land of three cultures: Muslim, Jewish and Christian. There were conflicts, but the eleventh century was considered a high point of cooperation between the Jewish and Muslim communities and a flourishing of culture. Caliph Al-Hakam II (961-976) is said to have founded a library of hundreds of thousands of volumes, something impossible to imagine in the rest of Europe at the time. One of the great contributions of Muslim Spain was the preservation and translation of classical philosophy.

Both Jews and Muslims, however, would suffer with the reunification of the peninsula under the Catholic monarchs, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, who were married in 1479. In 1492, the monarchs ordered the expulsion of all Jews and Muslims unless they converted to Christianity. Catholicism became the official religion and served as a proto-nationalism: To be Spanish was to be Catholic.

But the Catholic Church in Spain was far from a monolithic entity. One split was between the secular and the regular clergy. The secular clergy were loosely organized and charged with administering to Christian populations. These were the worldly orders, concerned with the day-to-day lives of their flocks, and as a result they needed to find economic activities in that world to sustain them. The regular clergy were tightly organized into orders – Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian – each with its separate rules and concerns. These clerics had largely

withdrawn from the world to the solitude of monasteries and they were accorded higher status because they were seen as devoting their lives to God rather than man. Members of the clergy served in government ministries, but the monarchs had the power of appointment of bishops. In fact, the Spanish Crown had more control over the Church than did any other monarchy in Europe. The two institutions were dependent upon one another, equal pillars of society.

Although 1492 is popularly referred to as the “reunification,” there is little accuracy in the term. The peninsula had always been a splintered entity, and the royal marriage did not create a territorial or administrative merger. Further, each kingdom was a loose confederation: Isabella’s “Aragon” included Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia and Sicily, each autonomous in legal, administrative and economic matters. There were still customs barriers between Aragon and Castile, the much larger region, which acquired the southern territories.

There were no Spaniards at this point, although the region was called Hispania starting in the Roman era. People identified with their region, such as Aragon or Catalonia, and more specifically with their city. This urban focus was so widespread that even in rural areas, people tended to live in nucleated towns and went out to their fields.

The social structure was divided most importantly along the lines of nobles and commoners, with the landed nobleman at the top. This hierarchy could be further subdivided by occupation, with professionals—trained for the Church, law or medicine—ranking at the top. Next were merchants, who while lower ranking had the advantage of access to liquid assets and were worldly through their ties to long-distance trade. These households were staffed by a variety of servants and retainers. More plebian than merchants were the artisans, though many gathered substantial assets in large shops employing staffs of journeymen, apprentices and slaves. And at the bottom of society were the farmers and herders, but even here there was a division based on

the size and success of agricultural enterprises.

At the center of Iberian life was the extended family, with cousins as closely tied as brothers. The head of the family was the patriarch, whose status was based partly on gender and on age. Women's positions, in turn, were dictated by the standing of their fathers and husbands. It was common for men to have sexual relationships outside of marriage, and the offspring were usually recognized and given help, although rarely included in the official family. The family might be viewed as a corporation, and it was desirable for nobles to have a son at court, a son in the clergy, and daughters who married into other noble families or into wealthy merchant families.

Like most peoples, the Iberians believed their ways of life, customs, language, and religion were superior to all others. But they also lived in a region of great diversity, exposed to many different ethnic groups and beliefs. When they arrived in the New World, they brought both their prejudices and familiarity with diversity with them.

THE AFRICAN

From the very beginning, some Africans from the Iberian Peninsula participated in the exploration and conquest of the Americas. The majority, however, came as slaves, with the first sent from Iberia as early as 1502. The slave trade brought people directly from Africa starting in Cuba in 1512 and in Brazil in 1538, continuing until the trade ended in Brazil in 1850 and in Cuba in 1866. During the course of three centuries, some three million slaves were sold into Spanish America and five million in Brazil.

Slaves came from West and Central Africa, a region that encompasses the Sahara Desert and its oases; the savanna immediately to the south, which is a semi-arid grassland; and tropical rain forest. The region's economies were based on agriculture – as in Eurasia and the Americas,

Africans began plant domestication around 5000 BCE – and featured both domestic and imported crops brought in through trade networks. Iron technology, begun circa 500 BCE and spread by Bantu expansion, allowed the expansion of agriculture into formerly unavailable land. Early states (from 200 to 700 C.E.) in West and Central Africa, such as the Jenne, developed through trade within sub-Saharan Africa. From 700 to 1600, trans-Saharan trade with Arabs and Muslims led to the growth of Western and Central African states with stronger governments, more pronounced class stratification, and larger urban systems.

Around 700, the first Muslim traders established commerce between the northern savanna regions and their home bases north of the Sahara. By 900, trade between sub-Saharan Africa and the Muslim world was substantial and regular. The Muslim traders brought cloth, salt, steel swords, glass, and luxury goods in exchange for gold, slaves, ostrich feathers, fine leathers, decorative woods, and cola nuts. Gold had been mined in West Africa since 800. But with the advent of the Muslim trade, there was a larger market for the mineral, which led to greater production, the development of larger cities, and a more powerful elite, with greater class stratification and stronger governments. There was also some conversion to Islam, especially among merchants, because Islam provided a code of ethics leading to the trust necessary for long-distance trade. Although rulers and commoners sometimes followed suit, conversion was often only nominal, and traditional practices continued. A similar pattern would be seen with Christianity in the New World.

The more organized states of 700 to 1600 CE often included an opulent life at court, furnished by talented artisans, who provided bronze castings, carved wooden sculptures, ivory carving, cast gold, featherwork, and painted leather. Commoners were employed in public works projects, including royal tombs, walled palaces, mosques, irrigation and drainage systems,

and great walls around cities.

While most independent polities were small, comparable to city-states, there were three imperial societies: Ghana, Mali and Songhai. Ghana was an inland empire centered on the western portion of present-day Mali. It consisted of a number of chiefdoms joined together. Oral tradition says Ghana had twenty kings before the time of Muhammad circa 600. A powerful empire from 700-1100 CE, it was destroyed by the Almoravids, and its fall led to the dispersal of the Soninke people. The kingdom of Mali, founded around 1200 CE, was even larger and richer than Ghana. Centered on the city of Niani in the old Ghana empire, it incorporated all of Ghana and extended west to the Atlantic Ocean. In the process, Mali overextended its military, and in the 1400s its capital of Timbuktu was taken over by Tuareg nomads. The Songhai was once a part of the eastern Mali empire. Founded in 1350, the empire grew by 1515 to become the largest sub-Saharan empire, with more than one million people. Eventually weakened by internal dissension – the rich province of Hausaland was lost after a local ethnic group staged a revolt – the empire collapsed in 1590, conquered by Moroccan forces while the Songhai fought over the royal succession.

The development of large and complex polities came later to the forest than savanna. The rise of complexity parallels the rise of large-scale trade networks with the savanna kingdoms to the north. They probably traded with Ghana, leading to the rise of a wealthy merchant class, which gained power and led the forest communities. By 1200, the Ife and Benin states developed sophisticated royal courts with an extravagant bronze sculptural tradition.

River systems linked these African regions, connecting the western Sudan to the Atlantic. Mali was the center of political power from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries largely because of its location at the headwaters of the Niger, Senegal, and Gambia river systems, which

united West Africa and provided a corridor that eventually added Hausa kingdoms, Yoruba states, and Nupe, Igala and Benin kingdoms via river to the Atlantic. This maritime culture facilitated trade and coastal protection.

Repeated invasions by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs brought foreigners to Africa as early as 100 BCE, but the fall of the seaport of Ceuta on the Strait of Gibraltar to the Portuguese in 1415 CE heralded new European incursions. The Europeans were attracted by Africa's commercial potential—gold, ivory, cotton, and spices. However, African naval power protected the region against raids, with the result that trade had to be carried on peacefully and on African terms. For example, Afonso I, king of Kongo, seized a French ship and crew for trading illegally on the coast in 1525.

The Portuguese soon enough discovered that the Africans themselves were the continent's most valuable export. Between 1441 and 1443, the Portuguese began to transport Africans to Europe for sale. The majority of these slaves were purchased from African authorities, who responded to the growing demand. There was already a widespread practice of slavery in Africa, where land was held communally and slaves were the only form of private, revenue-producing property. Land was made available to whoever could work it, and Africans would purchase slaves to fill that purpose. In practicality, the slaves functioned much like tenants and hired workers in Europe. In 1659, Giacinto Brugiotti da Vetralla commented that Central African slaves were "slaves in name only." Such comments have led to the conclusion that slavery in Africa did not incorporate the brutality of slavery in the New World, a view that would seem to be confirmed by Olaudah Equiano, a slave from Nigeria, who recounted the horrors of the middle passage, noting, "I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits."

African elites gladly participated in trade with Europeans, mostly for prestige and luxury items, since European trade offered nothing that Africans did not produce. Africans manufactured sufficient steel and cloth, including beautiful varieties that Europeans said rivaled Italian production, and in volume that rivaled the Dutch. Furthermore, although Africans did import European arms, they were of use primarily against fortifications, of which there were few. Warfare in Africa continued primarily with African weapons and for African political reasons.

The majority of Africans who came to the Americas came from three large cultural zones. The region that provided the majority of the first wave of slaves was Upper Guinea, ranging from the Senegal River to modern Liberia, where the Mande language family dominated. Next was Lower Guinea, where Akan and Aja languages predominated, from the Ivory Coast to Camaroon. The third primary area was Central Africa, including the Angola coast, Kongo, and the Costa de Mina, present-day Benin, and stretching inland as far as modern Zaire, where Bantu was the dominate family of languages.

While there was great diversity within these regions and language families—ranging from eight ethnic identities in Upper Guinea to twenty-seven in Central Africa—there was also enough commonality to help build a new culture in the Americas. While the designs differed, the various cultures had traditions of making cloth, which was draped and wrapped around the body; as well as pottery making, basket weaving, and rhythmic drumming were part of the musical tradition.

Most importantly, the Africans also brought their religious beliefs to the New World. Many of the slaves from Upper Guinea were Muslims, but the majority of Africans who came to the New World had spiritist beliefs. In this belief system, there is a material and an other world, where people go when they die. Some gifted people, known as diviners, could pass between the

two worlds, receiving revelations from the other world and communicating to people in the material world. These belief systems continued in the New World as a separate belief system alongside Catholicism. There was also a mixing of Catholic and African elements that developed into Santeria in Cuba, candomble in Brazil, and vudun in Haiti.

Africans could be found in all parts of Latin America and formed a large part of the population. They quickly became and remained the major work force in the Caribbean and Brazil. Their presence dominated the plantations that they worked, and their influence spread quickly to the “big house,” where African women served as cooks, wet nurses, and companions of the woman of the house, while black children romped with white children.

Male slaves outnumbered females by a ratio of almost two to one. One explanation has been that large landowners preferred men because they considered them better field hands and hence more profitable. However, African slave-owning societies preferred to own women, who had the primary responsibility for agriculture and who could be integrated into kin groups as concubines or wives. As a result, prices for women were higher than for men. Nonetheless, women in the New World often worked in the fields, in addition to domestic service. Their owners discouraged large-scale reproduction as uneconomical. Thus, the Latin American slave system was seldom self-sustaining and required constant replacement through the slave trade. This imbalance made it particularly difficult to continue West Africa family organization, which was based on a large extended household and polygamy.

African influence also permeated the cities, where slaves worked as domestic servants, peddlers, mechanics, and artisans. In the sixteenth century, blacks outnumbered whites in Lima, Mexico City, and Salvador da Bahia, the three principal cities of the Western Hemisphere. The sex ratio among slaves seems to have been more equal in the cities, where women played

particularly active roles as domestic servants, street vendors, prostitutes, and mistresses. The urban records seem to indicate that more freedwomen than freedmen existed. The city apparently offered the African woman more opportunity to change her status, partly because of her skills as vendor and her appeal as prostitute and mistress.

Africans were valued not simply for unskilled labor but for their fine artisanal skills, especially because unlike the indigenous they were skilled in iron work. Visitors to the Caribbean and Brazil remarked on the diversity of skills mastered and practiced by the Africans. They were masons, carpenters, smiths, lithographers, sculptors, artists, locksmiths, cabinetmakers, jewelers, and cobblers. Around the plantations and in the cities, these crafts people, artisans, and mechanics became an indispensable ingredient in New World society.

The Africans also were important as cowboys, particularly on the plains of Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. Slaves from the Senegambia area were particularly skilled with horses and cattle, and Angolans were noted for cattle raising. In Potosí and Nueva Granada, most of the supervisory positions were held by slaves. Africans also dominated the workforce in the copper mines of Venezuela.

Slaves continued to focus on their original nations, and, particularly in urban areas, elected kings and queens with great ceremony, celebrated traditional festivals, and formed mutual aid societies. Whatever cultural differences Africans may have had, they also were able to organize multi-ethnic runaway slave communities, known variously as *palenques* or *cumbes* in Spanish America and *quilombos* in Brazil. The most famous quilombo, Palmares, located in Alagoas, lasted roughly from 1630-1697; it included as many as 5,000 African slaves, from different African regions, speaking different languages, but all united in the community. There were six attempts to conquer Palmares between 1680 and 1686, and the final assault was won

only after a bitterly fought forty-four-day siege. Quilombos, in fact, were so established as communities that they competed with Brazilian farms and stores to sell supplies in the Rio de Janeiro area.

That African presence remained and was not entirely subsumed by the dominant culture is made clear in this description of a marketplace in Rio in the 1870s by Adèle Toussaint-Samson, a French traveler: “the large ‘Minas’ negresses, with their headdress in the shape of a muslin turban, with their faces full of scars and seams, having a chemise and a skirt with ruffles as their clothing, are squatted on mats, near their fruits and vegetables; at their sides are their boys and girls, in complete nudity.” In the 1870s, with the slave trade long over, such visible elements of African traditions were still being passed down by Afro-Brazilians.

MESTIZAJE AND THE CREATION OF NEW PEOPLE

The three peoples of the Americas came together in sometimes violent and sometimes consensual ways. Through their interactions, they created new groups of people: *mestizos*, a mixture of indigenous and European; *mulatto*, mixing African and European; and *zambo*, the joining of indigenous and African. The Iberians developed an extensive vocabulary in an attempt to describe the exact mixture of races. Iberians were already concerned with purity of blood, shunning any trace of Muslim or Jewish heritage. These concerns would be magnified with colonial race mixture, or *mestizaje*. Although originally the term referred specifically to indigenous-European mixtures, it came to be used more broadly to refer to all “race” mixtures, which produced a variety of darker-skinned people, known generally as *castas*.

Mestizaje would prove to be an extraordinarily complex issue. To Iberians, mixture generally was viewed as contamination. Yet at other times miscegenation was actually encouraged in order to facilitate economic relations with indigenous people or to hasten

assimilation. Indigenous peoples would sometimes reject mestizos for abandoning the indigenous side of the equation. Independence leader Simón Bolívar used the concept of mestizaje to argue that Spain's colonial subjects were not Spanish and should be independent, while Cuba's José Martí argued that the new nations should be faithful to their own creative mestizaje rather than adopt foreign ideals.

Many nineteenth-century elites hoped mestizaje would whiten their populations, leading to greater progress. However, elites also echoed the theories of the Frenchmen Count Joseph Arthur Gobineau and Gustave Le Bon, who argued that people of mixed race "always inherited the most negative characteristics of the blended races." In practice, nineteenth-century nation-building efforts often used mestizaje to deny the continued presence of indigenous people.

Twentieth-century Latin Americans would ponder the meaning of mestizaje, what it included from each group and what resulted. In Mexico in 1925, José Vasconcelos lauded the mestizo as "the cosmic race," although by 1944, he dismissed the concept as "one of my silly notions." In Andean countries, the mestizo was often disparagingly referred to as a *cholo*, a marginalized figure rejected by both whites and the indigenous. Brazilians would sometimes point to race mixture (*mestiçagem* in Portuguese) as supposed proof that racism did not exist in their country. Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre heralded miscegenation as the essence of national identity and a successful adaptation to the tropics in his seminal *Casa Grande e Senzala (The Mansions and the Shanties)*, which was wildly popular when it appeared in 1933 and frankly addressed issues of sexuality.

In fact, sexuality was at the heart of this view, exemplified by Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado's contention that racial problems could only be solved by "the mixture of blood." He contended, "No other solution exists, only this one which is born from love." Nonetheless, by

the late twentieth century, the cult of mestizaje had been transformed to cynicism, summed up deftly in one of the “187 Reasons Why Mexicans Can’t Cross the Border” by performance artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes – “because we’re still waiting to be cosmic.”

In the twenty-first century, mestizaje is frequently recast as hybridity, a notion more conceptual than racial, a post-modern pastiche of cultures past and present. Hybridity may be new as an analytical concept, but the reality on which it is based is as old as the conquest that brought these people together. Each contributed to the formation of unique civilizations based on mixture and conflict among the three. Overlaying these societies were powerful institutions that were imported from the Iberian Peninsula and adapted to local circumstances.

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Labels for Miscegenation in 18th-century New Spain

1. Spaniard and Indian beget mestizo
2. Mestizo and Spanish woman beget castizo
3. Castizo woman and Spaniard beget Spaniard
4. Spanish woman and Negro beget mulatto
5. Spaniard and mulatto woman beget morisco
6. Morisco woman and Spaniard beget albino
7. Spaniard and albino woman beget torna atrás
8. Indian and torna atrás woman beget lobo
9. Lobo and Indian woman beget zambaigo
10. Zambaigo and Indian woman beget cambujo
11. Cambujo and mulatto woman beget albarazado
12. Albarazado and mulatto woman beget barcino
13. Barcino and mulatto woman beget coyote
14. Coyote woman and Indian beget chamison
15. Chamiso woman and mestizo beget coyote mestizo
16. Coyote mestizo and mulatto woman beget ahí te estás

Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*
Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967, 58

Labels for Miscegenation in 18th-century Peru

1. Spaniard and Indian woman beget mestizo
2. Spaniard and mestizo woman beget cuarterón de mestizo
3. Spaniard and cuarteróna de mestizo beget quinterón
4. Spaniard and quinterona de mestizo beget Spaniard or requinterón de mestizo
5. Spaniard and Negress beget mulatto
6. Spaniard and mulatto woman beget quarterón de mulato
7. Spaniard and cuarteróna de mulato beget quinterón
8. Spaniard and quinterona de mulato beget requinterón

Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*
Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967, 58-59

Population Density of Latin America and Selected European Countries, 2005

COUNTRY	LAND AREA (In square kilometers)	POPULATION	DENSITY
Netherlands	33,889	16,407,491	484
Belgium	30,278	10,364,388	342
El Salvador	20,720	6,704,932	324
Haiti	27,560	8,121,622	295
United Kingdom	241,590	60,441,457	250
Germany	349,223	82,431,390	236
Italy	294,020	58,103,033	198
Dominican Republic	48,380	8,950,034	185
Denmark	42,394	5,432,335	128
Poland	304,465	38,635,144	127
France	545,630	60,656,178	111
Hungary	92,340	10,006,835	108
Cuba	110,860	11,346,670	102
Austria	82,444	8,184,691	99
Costa Rica	50,660	4,016,173	79
Honduras	111,890	6,975,204	62
Mexico	1,923,040	106,202,903	55
Ecuador	276,840	13,363,593	48
Nicaragua	120,254	5,465,100	45
Colombia	1,038,700	42,954,279	41
Panama	75,990	3,039,150	40
Guatemala	108,430	14,655,189	29
Venezuela	882,050	25,375,281	27
Brazil	8,456,510	186,112,794	22
Peru	1,280,000	27,925,628	21
Chile	748,800	15,980,912	21
Paraguay	397,300	6,347,884	20
Uruguay	173,620	3,415,920	19
Argentina	2,736,690	39,537,943	14
Bolivia	1,084,390	8,857,870	8

Source: Data drawn from Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*,

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Latin America's Environmental Woes

Brazil's Amazon rain forest is a jungle the size of Western Europe that is known as "the lungs of the world." It can absorb greenhouse gases and is home to 10 percent of the world's fresh water and 30 percent of the world's plant and animal species. And from the founding of the capital, Brasilia, in 1960 until 1992, 160,000 square miles of rain forest disappeared – an area equal in size to the nation of Paraguay or to the five Central American nations. From 1990 to 2003, it was further deforested at the average rate of 6,240 squares miles per year.

Environmental degradation is one of the most serious issues facing modern Latin America. The region encompasses some of the most endangered forest habitats on Earth, as well as the most rapid rates of deforestation. Coastal and marine areas are contaminated by land-based pollution, over-exploitation of fisheries, the conversion of habitat to tourism, oil and gas extraction, refining and transport. The region increasingly suffers from desertification, a process in which productive but dry land becomes unproductive desert. Desertification is caused by overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation, and poor irrigation practices.

In addition, damage is inflicted by United States-organized programs for drug eradication. Colombia uses aerial fumigation, spraying toxic herbicides on regions where drugs are produced. The spraying contaminates everything—schools, houses, water, pastures, farms, and the workers who toil in those fields. Residues are left in the ground and water, and many areas are defoliated. In reaction, subsistence farmers move farther up steep hillsides or into the Amazon rain forest.

And that's just the rural areas.

Seventy-seven percent of Latin Americans live in urban areas, making it the most

urbanized area in the “developing” world and as urban as the European Union. This change has occurred rapidly. In the 1950s, 60 percent of Latin Americans lived in the countryside. In 1960, for the first time more than 50 percent of the population was urban. The rapid influx of people strains urban water supplies and sanitation infrastructure.

São Paulo and Mexico City are each teeming with more than eighteen million people. In Brazil, hundreds of thousands live in shantytowns that began as temporary housing in the 1950s migrations and have since evolved into permanent slums. In Mexico City, the inability of the government to adequately house and provide services to its millions was spotlighted when a 1985 earthquake destroyed flimsy housing and left many homeless. Only Cuba has been able to manage urbanization by placing controls on population movement, developing the countryside, and developing urban centers other than Havana.

Problems are exacerbated by the region’s poverty and demands for job creation and economic development. In 2003, Brazil elected Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva, a candidate who pledged to help the country’s poor. One year into his term, environmentalists accused him of sacrificing the Amazon to the effort to create jobs for the 53 million Brazilians who live on less than \$1 a day.

Environmental Issues by Country

Argentina	Environmental problems (urban and rural) typical of an industrializing economy such as deforestation, soil degradation, desertification, air pollution, and water pollution
Bolivia	The clearing of land for agricultural purposes and the international demand for tropical timber are contributing to deforestation; soil erosion from overgrazing and poor cultivation methods (including slash-and-burn agriculture); desertification; loss of biodiversity; industrial pollution of water supplies used for drinking and irrigation
Brazil	Deforestation, endangered Amazon Basin plant and animal habitat, illegal wildlife trade; air and water pollution in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and several other large cities; land degradation and water pollution caused by improper mining activities; wetland degradation; severe oil spills
Chile	Widespread deforestation and mining threaten natural resources; air pollution from industrial and vehicle emissions; water pollution from raw sewage
Colombia	Deforestation; soil and water quality damage from overuse of pesticides; air pollution, especially in Bogotá, from vehicle emissions
Costa Rica	Deforestation and land use change, largely a result of the clearing of land for cattle ranching and agriculture; soil erosion; coastal marine pollution; fisheries protection; solid waste management; air pollution
Cuba	Air and water pollution; biodiversity loss; deforestation
Dominican Republic	Water shortages; soil eroding into the sea damages coral reefs; deforestation
Ecuador	Deforestation; soil erosion; desertification; water pollution; pollution from oil production wastes in ecologically sensitive areas of the Amazon Basin and Galapagos Islands
El Salvador	Deforestation; soil erosion; water pollution; contamination of soils from disposal of toxic wastes
Guatemala	Deforestation in the Petén rainforest; soil erosion; water pollution
Haiti	Extensive deforestation (much of the remaining forested land is being cleared for agriculture and used as fuel); soil erosion; inadequate supplies of potable water

Honduras	Urban population expanding; deforestation results from logging and the clearing of land for agricultural purposes; further land degradation and soil erosion hastened by uncontrolled development and improper land use practices such as farming of marginal lands; mining activities polluting Lago de Yojoa (the country's largest source of fresh water), as well as several rivers and streams, with heavy metals
Mexico	Scarcity of hazardous waste disposal facilities; rural to urban migration; natural fresh water resources scarce and polluted in north, inaccessible and poor quality in center and extreme southeast; raw sewage and industrial effluents polluting rivers in urban areas; deforestation; widespread erosion; desertification; deteriorating agricultural lands; serious air and water pollution in the national capital and urban centers along US-Mexico border; land subsidence in Valley of Mexico caused by groundwater depletion
Nicaragua	Deforestation; soil erosion; water pollution
Panama	Water pollution from agricultural runoff threatens fishery resources; deforestation of tropical rain forest; land degradation and soil erosion threatens siltation of Panama Canal; air pollution in urban areas; mining threatens natural resources
Paraguay	Deforestation; water pollution; inadequate means for waste disposal pose health risks for many urban residents; loss of wetlands
Peru	Deforestation (some the result of illegal logging); overgrazing of the slopes of the costa and sierra leading to soil erosion; desertification; air pollution in Lima; pollution of rivers and coastal waters from municipal and mining wastes
Uruguay	Water pollution from meat packing/tannery industry; inadequate solid/hazardous waste disposal
Venezuela	Sewage pollution of Lago de Valencia; oil and urban pollution of Lago de Maracaibo; deforestation; soil degradation; urban and industrial pollution, especially along the Caribbean coast; threat to the rainforest ecosystem from irresponsible mining operations

Source: Material drawn from Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*,

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>