

LATIN AMERICA

An Interpretive History

TENTH EDITION



Julie A. Charlip ■ E. Bradford Burns

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Tenth Edition

Julie A. Charlip

Whitman College

E. Bradford Burns

University of California, Los Angeles

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For our students

Brief Contents

1	Land and People	1	7	The Mexican Explosion	173
2	From Conquest to Empire	32	8	From World Wars to Cold War	199
3	Independence	61	9	The Revolutionary Option	218
4	New Nations	88	10	Debt and Dictatorship	245
5	The Emergence of the Modern State	120	11	The Limits of Liberalism	269
6	New Actors on an Old Stage	151	12	Forward into the Past?	287

Contents

Maps	xi		
Preface	xiii		
Acknowledgments	xiv		
1 Land and people	1	3 Independence	61
1.1: The Land	1	3.1: A New Sense of Self	61
Latin America's Environmental Woes	3	3.2: The Bourbon Reforms	63
1.2: The Indigenous	9	3.3: The Temptations of Trade	67
1.3: The European	18	3.4: The Impact of Ideas	70
1.4: The African	21	3.5: Early Warning Signs	72
1.5: Mestizaje and the Creation of New People	25	3.6: International Examples	74
Labels for Miscegenation in Eighteenth-Century New Spain	26	3.7: Impetus from the Outside	76
Labels for Miscegenation in Eighteenth-Century Peru	27	3.8: Elitist Revolts	77
¿Latin? America	29	3.9: Popular Revolution in Mexico	82
Questions for Discussion	31	3.10: Unsung Heroes and Heroines	84
Tables:		3.11: The Brazilian Exception	85
Population per Hectare of Agricultural Land in Latin America and Selected European Countries	10	3.12: Aftermath	87
		Questions for Discussion	87
2 From Conquest to Empire	32	4 New Nations	88
2.1: European Exploration	32	4.1: Monarchy or Republic?	88
2.2: Patterns of Conquest	34	4.2: Liberals or Conservatives?	90
2.3: Colonial Economy	37	4.3: Masses and Elites	92
2.4: Colonial Administration	44	4.4: Threats to New Nations	96
2.5: The Catholic Church	47	Mexico's Early National Woes	100
The Virgin de Guadalupe	53	4.5: Economic Instability	102
2.6: The Conquered Peoples	53	4.6: A Clash of Cultures	107
2.7: Colonial Society	56	4.7: Control by Caudillos	110
Questions for Discussion	60	4.8: Change and Continuity	118
Tables:		Questions for Discussion	119
Founding of Major New World Cities	36	Tables:	
		Abolition of Slavery	104
		5 The Emergence of the Modern State	120
		5.1: Political Stability	120
		5.2: Positivism and Progress	124

5.3: Economic Prosperity	131
5.4: Progress on the Periphery	134
5.5: Modest Industrialization	137
5.6: The Growth of Cities	138
5.7: Superficial Modernization	142
5.8: The Popular Challenge	144
Questions for Discussion	150

Tables:

Export Commodity Concentration Ratios, 1913	132
---	-----

6 New Actors on an Old Stage

6.1: The Presence of the United States	151
U.S. Relations with Latin America	160
6.2: The New Middle Class	161
Women's Suffrage in Latin America	164
6.3: The Working Class	165
6.4: The Middle Class in Politics	168
Questions for Discussion	172

7 The Mexican Explosion

7.1: Cracks in the Regime	173
7.2: Effective Suffrage and No Reelection	175
7.3: Patrias Chicas	177
7.4: The Maderista Revolt	178
7.5: Madero in Power	181
7.6: ¡Viva Zapata!	182
7.7: Huerta and the Counterrevolution	184
7.8: A Radical Constitution	188
7.9: The Radicals Lose	190
7.10: Las Soldaderas	190
7.11: From Destruction to Construction	191
7.12: The Apex of the Revolution	196
7.13: A Revolutionary Balance Sheet	197
Questions for Discussion	198

Tables:

Land Distribution in the Mexican Revolution	193
---	-----

8 From World Wars to Cold War 199

8.1: Economic Crises	199
8.2: Dictators and Populists	202
8.3: Latin America Turns Inward	208
8.4: Guatemala: A Flirtation with Democracy	212
Questions for Discussion	217

Tables:

Establishment of Depression Dictatorships, 1930s	204
--	-----

151 9 The Revolutionary Option 218

9.1: Bolivia	219
9.2: Cuba	220
9.3: Cuba's Impact	228
Development or Dependency?	229
9.4: Chile	236
9.5: Nicaragua	239
Questions for Discussion	244

Tables:

Latin American Military Coups, 1961–1964	231
Latin American Guerrilla Groups	233

10 Debt and Dictatorship 245

10.1: Changing Economic Patterns	245
10.2: Military Models for Change	248
10.3: War in Central America	254
10.4: The Church Under Attack	260
10.5: The New Social Movements	262
10.6: Do Elections Make Democracies?	265
Questions for Discussion	268

Tables:

Antipolitical Military Regimes, 1964–1990	249
---	-----

11 The Limits of Liberalism 269

11.1: The End of the Cold War	270
-------------------------------	-----

11.2: Free Trade and the Zapatistas	272	Tables:	
11.3: Neoliberalism and Its Discontents	277	Latin America Elects Leftists	289
11.4: Colombia: The Longest War	282	Women Presidents in Latin America	292
11.5: The End of Revolution?	285	Latin American Inequality Data Share of Income by Quintile	304
Questions for Discussion	286		
12 Forward into the Past?	287	Latin America through Art	311
12.1: Latin America Swings Left	288	A Chronology of Significant Dates in Latin American History	319
12.2: A Mobilized Population	294	Recommended Reading	325
12.3: The Conservative Exceptions	298	A Glossary of Spanish, Portuguese, and Indigenous Terms	338
12.4: A New Regional Independence	300	A Glossary of Concepts and Terms	341
12.5: Rise of the Middle Class—and the Vulnerable	302	Index	344
12.6: Change and Continuity	304	Credits	364
An Argentine Becomes Pope	308		
Questions for Discussion	309		

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Maps

Political Map of Latin America	4	Mexico, 1824–1853	97
Physical Map of Latin America	8	The Overthrow of Díaz	180
Pre-Columbian America	15	The Madero Regime	183
Iberian Peninsula	20	Huerta vs. the Constitutionals	185
African Kingdoms	23	Carranza vs. the Conventionists	187
Viceroyalties in the Colonial Americas, 1776	46	Carranza in Charge	189
Latin America in 1830	85		

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Preface

I have always endeavored to substantially update each edition of *Latin America: An Interpretive History*. The tenth edition offers the greatest change to date—the addition of a new chapter. In the ninth edition, I looked at the “Pink Tide,” the swing left in Latin America that began at the end of the twentieth century. Now fifteen years into the twenty-first century, it is clear that this change was not a brief moment. Latin America has changed profoundly in this century, and those changes deserve a closer look. These changes have brought a new and expanded prosperity for more of the population. Unfortunately, these changes have not diminished the central paradigm of the text: “poor people inhabit rich lands” because the elites have “tended to confuse their own well being and desires with those of the nation at large.”

New to this Edition

- Chapter 11, now titled “The Limits of Liberalism,” has been revised to focus only on the late twentieth century, including expanded attention to the end of the Cold War and the war in Colombia while asking whether revolution has come to an end in Latin America.
- A new Chapter 12 recasts as a question the title of the old closing chapter, “Forward into the Past?” This exciting new chapter focuses on the twenty-first century and includes an expanded section, “Latin America Swings Left,” updating the political changes in the region. The new section “A Mobilized Population” addresses the new movements that

struggle to push the governments further left, including groups focused on race and LG-BTQ rights. “The Conservative Exceptions” looks at Mexico, as well as the coups that ended progressive governments in Honduras and Paraguay. “A New Regional Independence” shows how the region has challenged the United States on the drug war and shown more independence by welcoming investment from China and joining the BRICS movement. “Rise of the Middle Class—And the Vulnerable” shows that despite profound economic changes in the region that have brought greater prosperity to more people, Latin America continues to be the region of greatest economic inequality in the world. And finally, “Change and Continuity” expands the Latin American theoretical approaches presented to include modernity/coloniality/decoloniality.

- Chapter 12 also includes a brief profile of Pope Francis, the Argentine native who has taken the world stage with a renewed focus on poverty and social justice.
- Further attention has been given to women through new sections, “Unsung Heroes and Heroines,” in Chapter 3, “Independence,” and “Las Soldaderas,” in Chapter 7, “The Mexican Explosion.” In addition, there is also an expanded discussion of the remarkable number of women presidents in the region in Chapter 12.
- In addition to updating the table “Latin America Elects Leftists,” there are two new tables: “Women Presidents in Latin America” and “Latin American Inequality Data.”

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Modern Latin America, have asked questions that made me rethink aspects of the textbook. This book is for them and shaped by them. As always, I am most indebted to my husband, Charly Bloomquist, and my daughter, Delaney; they are my joy.

Julie A. Charlip
Walla Walla, Washington

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.”

As Spanish colonies, the New World offered wealth that other Europeans envied. The British priest Thomas Gage commented: “The streets of Christendom must not compare with those of Mexico City in breadth and cleanliness but especially in the riches of the shops that adorn them.”

But the images of an earthly paradise and colonial splendor would fade over time. By the nineteenth century, Latin America was considered “backward.” In the twentieth century, the region was 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? In 1972, E. Bradford Burns, the original author of this textbook, 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 are still poor.

Latin America has moved from paradise to poverty as a result of historical patterns that have developed over the years. This book explores 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 populace, and on the size of the population.

1.1: 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, he had stumbled upon the unexpected: a region of such vastness and geographical 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 geographic attributes of Latin America have 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 islands off the coasts, and much of what is now the United States. Contemporary Latin America is a huge region of a continent and a half, stretching 7,000 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 8 million square miles.

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

In the U.S. 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 region where 80 percent of the seismic and volcanic activity of the earth takes place. That we in the United States seem to know so much about these events, however, says more about the limited media portrayal of the region 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 in 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 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

Latin America's Environmental Woes

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, overexploitation 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.

And that's just the rural areas.

Eighty percent of Latin Americans live in urban areas, making it the most urbanized area in the world. 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. São Paulo and Mexico City each teem with more than 20 million people. Twenty-three percent of Latin America's urban population lives in slums without access to adequate housing, clean water, and sanitation. Urban environmental problems include air and water pollution, fresh water shortages, poor disposal of waste, and industrial contamination.

Brazil, the region's largest country, is illustrative of the environmental challenges. Enormous São Paulo is home to some of the oldest and most extensive shantytowns (*favelas*). But Brazil's territory also includes 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest, which consumes significant portions of the carbon dioxide released on the planet, contains one-fifth of the world's fresh water, and has the world's greatest diversity of flora and fauna. But the rainforest is constantly under attack by loggers, oil and mineral exploration, and the construction of roads and hydroelectric dams.

Brazilian leaders have made a concerted effort to reduce deforestation, from a high of 10,723 square miles in 2004 to 2,275 miles in 2013. But at the same time, deforestation rose by 29 percent in 2013, raising fears that progress might be reversed, despite

legislation and the formation of an environmental police force. The fires burning to clear land were so extensive they could be seen and were photographed from the International Space Station.

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, who pledged to help the country's poor. One year later, environmentalists accused him of sacrificing the Amazon to job creation efforts for the 53 million Brazilians living on less than \$1 a day. A 2009 study indicates that development accompanying deforestation does bring a short-lived increase in income, literacy, and longevity. But those improvements are transitory—as developers move on to new land, the populations of the cleared areas lose all they had gained.

Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, continued to promote social programs reducing poverty while pursuing economic development projects, such as the Belo Monte dam, in the Amazon region. Environmentalists criticized the president in 2012, just weeks before Brazil hosted the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20 because it marked the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The Brazil Committee in Defense of the Forests said Rousseff gave in to the agricultural lobby by partially vetoing a new Forest Code to waive fines and reduce requirements for restitution of areas illegally deforested in the past.

The tensions between protecting the environment and providing for human needs were captured in the change of the UN conference titles, from 1992's "environment and development" to Rio+20's "sustainable development." As Rousseff headed into her reelection race in 2014, her main rivals were Aécio Neves, who said Brazil needed to be more business friendly, and Marina Silva, a prominent environmentalist. Despite Silva's initial burst of popularity, she ended up trailing her developmentalist foes. Rousseff won, but her pro-business opponent polled 48 percent of the vote.

Map 1.1 Political Map of Latin America

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 running 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, whereas 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 short distance of the ocean.

Four major river networks, the Magdalena, Orinoco, Amazon, and La Plata, flow into the Caribbean or Atlantic, providing 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 fourteen times. In places, it is impossible to see from shore to shore, and over



This turn-of-the-century photograph captures the drama of Chile's Aconcagua Valley in the towering Andes. (Library of Congress)

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, a 180-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 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, 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 greater in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, which alone encompasses 84 of the 104 ecological regions in the world and twenty-eight different climates. 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 United States–Mexico border is an area of arid or temperate climate and low population, and it 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, but both have small dry areas. Although 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 lowland coasts is about 20 percent higher than that of 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, in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien Años de Soledad*, 1967). At fourteen, when García Márquez 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.”

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 number of humans in that drama has been an issue of great concern, especially in the context of Latin American development. In the 1960s, Latin

Map 1.2 Physical Map of Latin America

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%ADo_de_la_Plata, <http://cluckfield.com/?p=320> and "Latin America's Physical Geography" in Cathryn L. Lombardi, *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.



America's annual population growth 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 rate had slowed to 1.5 percent, close to the world average of 1.4 percent. By 2013, Latin America and the Caribbean's 1.12 percent growth was below the world's 1.16 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, Latin America has a smaller population than Europe. Most countries in Latin America have a far lower population density for its agricultural land than the countries of Europe, which are able to feed its populations not just from domestic agricultural production but also by importing food from other countries.

Population growth is a serious issue for many reasons—environmental concerns, quality of life, and maternal well-being. But it is a poor explanation for Latin America's economic travails, which owe more to international and national power relations and choices. The international distribution of goods has little to do with a country's population: The 12 percent of the world's population that lives in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe accounts for 60 percent of private consumption, according to the Worldwatch Institute. The United States has 5 percent of the world's population but uses 25 percent of the world's energy.

To many Latin Americans, northern concern about population growth in the region reflects long-term racial and cultural biases against a population that has its roots in the people who came to the region from Asia, Europe, and Africa.



Latin America's tropical beauty is on display in this 1911 photograph from Panama. (Library of Congress)

1.2: The Indigenous

Some 15,000 to 25,000 years ago, when a land bridge still existed between Asia and North America, migrants crossed the Bering Strait. Moving slowly southward, they dispersed throughout North and South America. Over the millennia, at an uneven rate, some moved from 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.

Table 1.1 Population per Hectare of Agricultural Land in Latin America and Selected European Countries

Country	Population per hectare
Netherlands	9.1
Belgium	8.4
Haiti	5.8
Germany	4.8
El Salvador	4.0
Italy	4.4
Dominican Republic	4.2
United Kingdom	3.7
Guatemala	3.5
Austria	2.7
Poland	2.6
Costa Rica	2.6
Honduras	2.5
France	2.3
Denmark	2.1
Ecuador	2.1
Hungary	1.9
Cuba	1.8
Panama	1.7
Venezuela	1.4
Peru	1.2
Nicaragua	1.2
Colombia	1.1
Chile	1.1
Mexico	1.1
Brazil	0.7
Paraguay	0.3
Argentina	0.3
Bolivia	0.3
Uruguay	0.2

SOURCE: Based on population statistics from The World Bank, 2013, <http://wdi.worldbank.org>. and agricultural area statistics from United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2012, <http://faostat.fao.org>. Agricultural area comprises areas of temporary crops, permanent crops, and permanent meadows and pastures.

The indigenous people can best be understood by grouping them as nonsedentary, semisedentary, and sedentary societies. Nonsedentary societies were gathering and hunting groups that followed a seasonal cycle of moving through a delimited territory in search of food; they were mostly

found in the area that now encompasses the northern Mexico frontier, the Argentine pampas, and the interior of Brazil. In semisedentary 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 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. The social organization of the various indigenous groups was shaped by their environments, which shaped particular material cultures.

The early American cultures were varied, but a majority shared enough traits to permit a few generalizations. Family or clan units served as the basic social organization. All displayed 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 they 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 sedentary 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



A Miskito man in Nicaragua shows the continuing presence of indigenous populations.
(Photograph by Julie A. Charlip)

furnished fruits, berries, nuts, and roots. Tilling the soil produced other foods, such as corn and potatoes. 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 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 9 million and 100 million people inhabited the Western Hemisphere. Scholars still heatedly debate the figures, and one can find forceful arguments favoring each extreme; a commonly used number now is 54 million.

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 which had a word in their language that grouped together all the indigenous people of the hemisphere. They were as differentiated as the ancestral tribes of Europe, and their identities were locally based. The most important indigenous groups were the Mexica of the Aztec empire and the Mayas of Mexico and Central America; the Carib and the Arawak of the Caribbean area; the Chibcha of Colombia; the Inca empire 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.

Empire may be a misnomer for the Maya civilization, which dominated parts of what is now southern Mexico and northern Central America. The Maya had no central capital and authority, and some have likened the region to the ancient Greeks, who might be regarded as religiously and artistically united but consisting of politically sovereign states. 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 have suggested that 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 Mayan civilization, and the Mayan creation account 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 and 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 time available 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 indigenous 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 empire, the Aztec, expanded and flourished in the fifteenth century. The Aztec empire originated with the Mexica, a group that migrated from the north in the early thirteenth century to the central valley of Mexico, where they conquered several prosperous and highly advanced city-states. Constant conquests gave prominence to the warriors, and, not surprisingly, among multiple divinities the gods of war and the sun predominated. Because the Mexica believed that the gods had sacrificed themselves to create the world, the propitiation of the gods in turn required human sacrifices. In 1325, the Mexica founded Tenochtitlan, their island capital, and from that religious and political center they radiated outward to absorb other cultures until they controlled all of Central Mexico. The misnomer Aztec for the people of the empire is drawn from the name of the Mexica's



The Mayan monument known as the Castillo at Chichén Itzá in the Yucatan is indicative of the sophisticated societies that predated the Spanish conquest. (Library of Congress)

original northern, and perhaps mythical, homeland, Aztlán, and refers specifically to the alliance of the three dominant city-states of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. The people are sometimes referred to as Nahuatl speakers of the Nahuatl language. Their highly productive system of agriculture included the *chinampas*, floating gardens that made effective use of their lake location. As a result, they were able to support a large population, with the population of Tenochtitlan estimated at 200,000, larger than any European city. The Mexica devised the pictograph, an accurate calendar, impressive architecture, and an elaborate and effective system of government that dominated the Central Valley of Mexico, with trade networks extending as far south as present-day Nicaragua.

Largest, oldest, and best organized of the indigenous civilizations was the so-called Incan, which flowered in the harsh environment of the Andes. The Inca was in fact the ruler of the empire, which was named Tawantinsuyu. 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, an astounding feat when one realizes that it was run without the benefit—or hindrance—of written accounts or records. The only record system was the *quipu*, cords upon which knots were made to record information. 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, their achievements were magnificent. Challenged by 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 indigenous civilizations, but 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 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

Map 1.3 Pre-Columbian America

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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 for all intents and purposes Church and State were one. The Incan and Aztec emperors were both 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 boasted 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 Tenochtitlan 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 because they lacked draft animals to pull wheeled vehicles. However, the indigenous people 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, whereas a boy would be given a shield and arrows. Many scholars contend that these roles were different but not necessarily unequal; 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 they served as midwives. In Inca society, women took care of the home, but they 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.

Although Mexica women in Central Mexico 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 semisedentary farming societies. 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 were loosely organized. The small, temporary villages, often surrounded by a crude wooden stockade, were, when possible, located along a riverbank. The indigenous 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 groups 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 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 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 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 people 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 indigenous emerged as wicked villains, brutes who desperately needed the civilizing hand of Europe.

The European romantics who thought they saw utopia in native life obviously exaggerated. The indigenous by no means 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.”

1.3: 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 Strait 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 B.C.E. to the late fifth century, which was followed by rule of 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 between Berbers and Arabs within the Muslim world. Furthermore, although many Christians converted to Islam, the majority of the rural population was still Christian as late

as 948, when Arab geographer Mohammed Abul-Kassem Ibn Hawqal visited. In addition, Christian groups in the north continued to resist 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 had gained strength. The crusade to retake the peninsula, the *reconquista*, began 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, resulting in 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 that 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 Aragón, 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 religious, 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 a world of its own, with 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 to man.

Another significant split within the Church was between official and folk religion. The official church dogma emphasized the one true God, the Trinity, Jesus as redeemer, and the importance of the Church and its sacraments, particularly baptism and confession. Popular religion emphasized the humanity and suffering of Jesus and made cults of Mary and the various saints, which were the patrons of guilds and towns and represented particular maladies and problems. While priests taught the official rites of the church, Spanish immigrants to the Americas were more likely to follow folk practices.

Map 1.4 Iberian Peninsula

SOURCE: Based on <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/maps/1492spain.jpg>.



Members of the clergy served in government ministries, but the monarchs had the power to appoint bishops. The Spanish Crown had more control over the Church than any other monarchy in Europe. The two institutions were mutually dependent, 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 "Aragón" included Aragón, Catalonia, Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia, and Sicily, each autonomous in legal, administrative, and economic matters. There were still customs barriers between Aragón and Castile.

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 Aragón 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 despite lower rank 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 among them 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 partly based on gender and partly 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 were they 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 or 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 with them both their prejudices and their familiarity with diversity.

1.4: The African

From the very beginning, some free Africans from the Iberian Peninsula participated in 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, nearly 2.5 million slaves were sold into Spanish America and 4.8 million in Brazil.

Slaves came from West and Central Africa, a region encompassing the Sahara Desert and its oases; the savanna immediately to the south, which is semiarid grassland; and the tropical rain forest. The region's economies were based on agriculture—as in Eurasia and the Americas, Africans began plant domestication around 5000 B.C.E.—and featured both domestic and imported crops brought in through trade networks. Iron technology, begun circa 500 B.C.E. and spread by Bantu-language speaker expansion, allowed the extension of agriculture into formerly unavailable land. Early states (200–700 C.E.)



This woman in Bluefields, Nicaragua, is part of a substantial population that is of African descent. (Photograph by Julie A. Charlip)

in West and Central Africa, such as Djenne, developed through trade within sub-Saharan Africa. From 700 to 1600 C.E., 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.

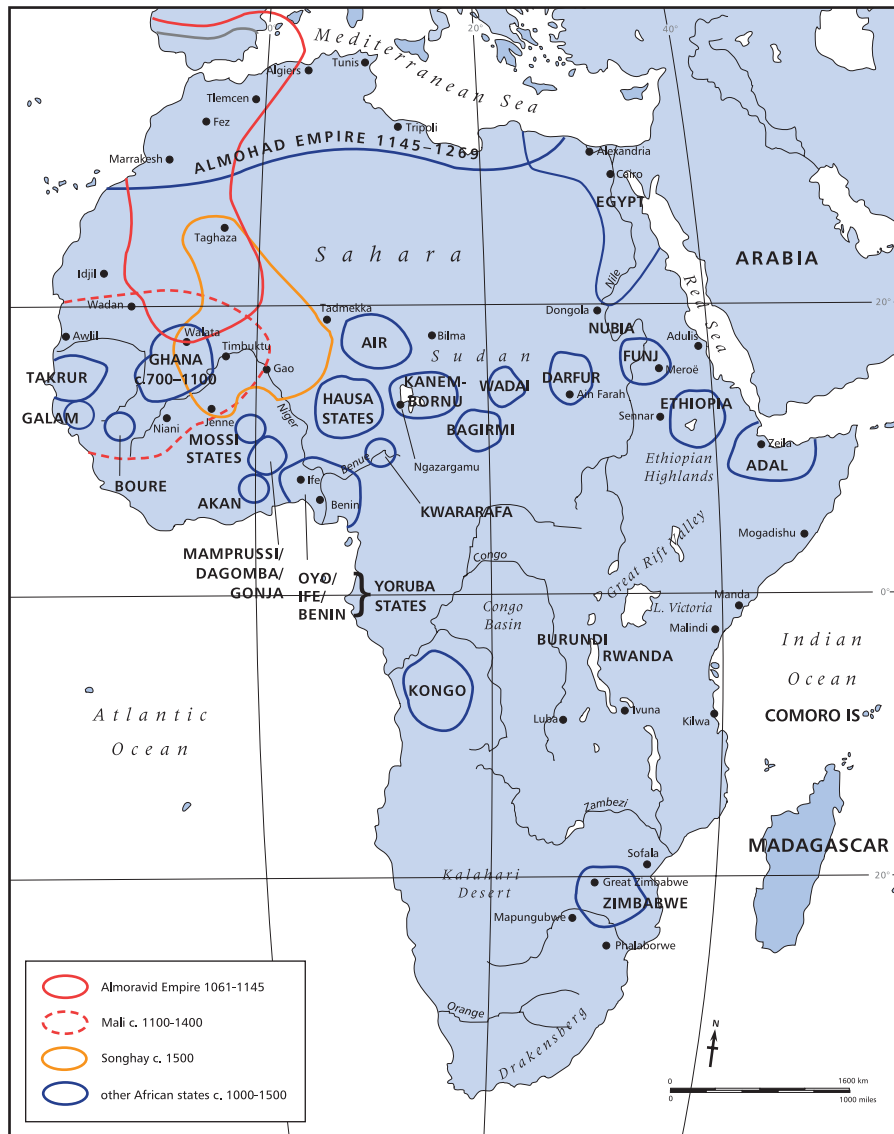
Around 700, the first Muslim traders established commerce between the northern savanna regions and their home bases north of the Sahara. By 900 C.E., trade between sub-Saharan Africa and the Muslim world was substantial and regular. The Muslim traders brought cloth, salt, steel swords, glass, and luxury goods in exchange for gold, slaves, ostrich feathers, fine leathers, decorative woods, and kola nuts. Gold had been mined in West Africa since 800 C.E. 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 700–1600 C.E. often included an opulent life at court, furnished by talented artisans, who provided bronze castings, carved wooden sculptures, ivory carving, cast gold, feather work, 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.

Although 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 C.E. A powerful empire from 700–1100 C.E., it was destroyed by the Almoravids, and its fall led to the dispersal of the Soninke people. The kingdom of Mali, founded around 1200 C.E., 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. Songhai was once a part of the eastern Mali Empire. Founded in 1350, the empire grew by 1515 to become

Map 1.5 African Kingdoms

SOURCE: Adapted from Howard Spodek, *The World's History Combined*, 3rd ed. © 2006. Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.



the largest sub-Saharan empire, with more than 1 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 linked the West African region 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.

The first advanced culture in sub-Saharan Africa was Nok, a society of iron users which developed around 1000 BCE in what is now central Nigeria and ended circa 300 BCE. Archaeologists have found terracotta sculptures from Nok that resemble subsequent findings in Yoruba areas.

Repeated invasions by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs brought foreigners to western Africa as early as 100 B.C.E., but the fall of the seaport of Ceuta on the Strait of Gibraltar to the Portuguese in 1415 C.E. heralded new European incursions. 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 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. Before the Europeans came, Africans were collecting slaves as prisoners of war. In societies where land was held communally, 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 supposition that slavery in Africa did not incorporate the brutality of slavery in the Americas.

African elites gladly participated in trade with Europeans, mostly for prestige and luxury items because European trade offered nothing that Africans did not produce. Africans manufactured sufficient steel and cloth, including beautiful varieties that Europeans said rivaled Italian manufacture and in volume that rivaled Dutch production. 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 two waves of slaves was Senegambia. The first slaves came from Upper Guinea, ranging from the Senegal River to modern Liberia, where the Mande language family dominated. Next was Lower Guinea, ranging from the Ivory Coast to Cameroon, where Akan and Aja languages were predominant. The third primary area was West Central Africa. The region included the Angola coast, Kongo, the Costa de Mina, present-day Benin, and stretching inland as far as modern Zaire, where Bantu was the dominant family of languages. Among the people who were enslaved, and ethnicities that appeared most frequently in Latin American documents, were the Fulani, Mandingo, Asante, Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo.

Although there was great diversity within these regions and language families—with dozens of ethnic identities in Upper Guinea and Central Africa—there was also enough commonality to help build a new culture in the Americas. Though the designs differed, the various cultures had traditions of making cloth, which the people draped and wrapped around their bodies. They all were accomplished at pottery making and basket weaving and used rhythmic drumming as part of their musical tradition. Most cultures used pounded or steamed starchy flours—made from millet, cassava, yam, and in Upper Guinea, rice—as the central component of meals.

Most important, 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. Although many groups believed in a creator god, all of the groups' beliefs included a variety of gods or spirits responsible for various areas of life, and the spirits of ancestors continued to play a role in people's lives. In this belief system, there is a material and an otherworld, 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 them to people in the material world. The importance of those beliefs was attested to by the Nigerian slave Olaudah Equiano, who recounted the horrors of the middle passage, noting, "I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits."

1.5: 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; *mulattos*,

mixing African and European; and *zambos*, 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*.

Race is a problematic term, freighted with the baggage of nineteenth- and twentieth-century usages constructing human categories by phenotype and assigning characteristics to them. Certainly, once those categories were created and social status assigned accordingly, members of “races” frequently shared experiences based on their position in one of those categories. But people do not inherently share traits based on these groupings, and the Europeans, Africans, and indigenous of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries certainly did not think so.

On the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century, privilege was allocated according to legal status—noble, commoner, and slave. Legal status was typically linked with kinship, which meant status was linked to bloodlines. As a result, elites became concerned that bloodlines be pure, uncontaminated by Jewish and Muslim links. However, Spaniards were puzzled by the indigenous; intellectuals debated their status, wondering whether they had souls and where they fit into the hierarchical social system. When the Spanish decided that the indigenous were inherently inferior, a new ideology of race began to take form. That assignment of race would turn out to be fluid rather than fixed; nonetheless, Spaniards made an issue of whiteness and ranked darker people at the lower end of the social scale.

Labels for Miscegenation in Eighteenth-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

Labels for Miscegenation in Eighteenth-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

SOURCE: Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1967), 58–59.

Social scientists have tended to use the term *race* to refer to populations grouped by phenotype, particularly skin color, giving race a fixed, biological status, and use ethnicity to refer to practices that define and separate people on the basis of more fluid cultural signifiers. As a result, blacks in Latin America are frequently studied in terms of race, while the indigenous are most often studied in terms of culture—clothing, food, music, art, ways of life, religion, and perception. But the boundaries of race and ethnicity have been porous in Latin America, and the bridges across those borders have created new groups that defy easy identification.

Mestizaje would prove to be an extraordinarily complex issue. To Iberians, mixture was generally 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, whereas 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 Count Joseph Arthur Gobineau and Gustave Le Bon, French intellectuals, who argued that people of mixed race “always inherited the most negative characteristics of the blended races.” In practice, the Latin American elites who organized nineteenth-century nation-building efforts often used mestizaje to deny the continued presence of indigenous people, claiming they had all blended into the new mestizo citizens.

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,” supposedly combining the best of all other races, 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 by poet Juan Felipe Herrera in *187 Reasons Why Mexicanos Can’t Cross the Border* (2007)—“because we’re still waiting to be cosmic.”

In the twenty-first century, *mestizaje* has frequently been recast as *hybridity*, a notion more conceptual than racial, a postmodern pastiche of cultures past and present. Recently, the term *hybridity* has been challenged as well. The concern is usually that any of these terms suggests a purity of each element in the mixture before contact—an idea that the history of the pre-Columbian Americas, Iberia, and Africa shows not to be the case. Of even more concern is the idea of assimilation or acculturation, often portrayed as a one-way street of Iberian dominant culture overpowering indigenous and African elements. *Mestizaje* frequently has been employed by Latin American governments as a way of effectively eliminating black and indigenous communities, identities that were actively reclaimed in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Historian David Buisseret has suggested the use of the term *creolization*. *Creole* refers to people of European descent (or African descent in the U.S. colonies) born in the Americas. *Creolization*, then, describes “something that is born or developed in the New World.” It was in this way, Buisseret notes, that “a truly new world came into being in those regions that the sixteenth-century Europeans prematurely called their ‘New World’.”

Hybridity or *creolization* 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 new societies on the basis of mixture and conflict among the three. Overlaying these societies were powerful institutions that were imported from the Iberian Peninsula but had to be adapted to local circumstances.

¿Latin? America

Latin America did not exist as a region until the nineteenth century. Before then, it was known by Iberians as *the New World*, *the Indies*, and *the colonies*. Only the last term was literally true. The region was a new world only to the Europeans, and obviously, not to those who lived there. It was the Indies only because of Columbus's misplaced hopes. And it was the Americas after another Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci.

Certainly, before the nineteenth century, no one conceived of a Latin America. The Aztec empire saw Anáhuac as home, but it would become the Viceroyalty of New Spain and then Mexico—a nation whose boundaries would change dramatically over time. Inca leaders called their home Tawantinsuyu, but it would become the Viceroyalty of Peru, and eventually it would become several countries: Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.

The idea of a Latin American people and region originated with French author Michel Chevalier, who theorized in the 1830s that the world was increasingly dominated by people whose roots were Anglo-Saxon, in contrast to the sensibilities of people, like the French, whose roots, at least linguistically, were Latin. In 1833, Chevalier was sent by the French government to the United States and Mexico, where he developed the idea that the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Americas shared the culture of Latin Europe and perhaps even formed a Latin race.

Chevalier's idea was transformed into *América Latina* by two South Americans living in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century—Chilean Francisco Bilbao and Colombian José María Caicedo. Bilbao used the term *latinoamericano* in writings in the 1850s and most notably at a conference in Paris in 1856. Both writers used the term to differentiate the former Iberian colonies from North America, particularly the expanding United States. In his 1857 poem “Las Dos Américas,” Caicedo contends that the “Latin American race” shared origins and a mission—to confront the Saxon race, an enemy threatening Latin American liberty. By then, the United States had already acquired half of Mexico, and a U.S. filibuster had tried to conquer Central America.

Bilbao and Caicedo—both steeped in French intellectual thought, as were most Latin American elites—sought Latin American unity to offset U.S. ambitions. But Chevalier continued to see the region as linked to Latin Europe, particularly to France. This contention would give France a claim in the hemisphere. As adviser to Napoleon III, Chevalier's ideas bolstered the 1861 French invasion of Mexico.

Use of the term continued throughout the nineteenth century and became engrained in the twentieth. Indeed, *Latin America* is one of the oldest world regional designations. It is a problematic designation, however. Geographer Harm de Blij suggested to the American Association of Geographers in 2008 that if *Anglo America* is no longer routinely used in geography curriculum, as it was fifty years earlier, perhaps *Latin America* as a designation should be retired as well. *Latin America*, however, remains ensconced on the association's Web page, which includes links to Latin American geography organizations.

One reason that *Latin America* lives on, while *Anglo America* does not, is that the label has been embraced by the region itself in the years since independence, giving the term historical resonance. The term was reinforced in the post-World War II years by U.S. emphasis on area studies and by the formation in 1966 of the Latin American Studies Association, encompassing scholars from around the world and across disciplines who study Latin America. But it remains a complicated term.

In terms of physical geography, *Latin America* does not simply follow continental divisions, akin to *North* and *South America*—and these designations are fraught with problems as well. Until World War II, the Americas were frequently described as one continent. By the 1950s, most geographers concluded that there were two continents—but they did not agree on the dividing point. The southern border of North America over time has been drawn at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Río San Juan, and the Costa Rica—Panama border. The latter was particularly the case when Panama was still part of Colombia. After Panama seceded in 1903, the dominant marker became Darien, making

Panama's southern border the edge of North America. Maps and geographical definitions are representations of power, and it can be argued that the designation of Darien increases the size of North America, increasing the sphere of the dominant North American power.

Within that North American area is Central America, which is geographically the area from Guatemala to Panama, though geopolitically it frequently excludes Belize and Panama. The region has variously been thought of as part of the continent of North America, or as a transition zone between the two American continents.

That Latin America is not merely a category of physical geography can be seen by the region's exclusions: Belize, formerly British Honduras, is rarely considered part of Latin America. On the South American continent, Latin America excludes Guyana, which was settled by the British; Suriname, settled by the Dutch; and French Guiana, which is still part of France. The exclusion of French Guiana (as well as Quebec) would seem to also favor excluding Haiti from Latin America. The main reason that Haiti frequently gets included in Latin America is because of the impact of Haiti's revolution on the independence movements of the region.

It has been suggested that a more accurate designation for Latin America might be *Ibero-America*, indicating the predominantly Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries that were colonies of Spain and Portugal. However, that designation seems, even more than *Latin America*, to privilege the role of the colonizing powers. *Hispanic* or *Hispano-America* does the same and leaves out Brazil.

Critics of the name *Latin America* argue that it leaves out the indigenous, African, and mestizo aspects of Latin America. But the critics have been short of suggestions for a replacement term that would encompass all of those elements of the region in a succinct name.

Some indigenous people in the region have adopted the name *Abya-Yala*, a word from the Kuna of Panama and Colombia meaning "place of life." Aymara leader Takir Mamani suggested the adoption of the term to mean "Continent of Life," in place of the term *Americas*. The name has been embraced by some indigenous people from Canada to Chile but

has made little inroads outside the activist indigenous community.

In the 1990s, scholars began to rethink the *Latin America* designation. The Ford Foundation launched a project called "Rethinking Area Studies." Many institutes and centers chose new names: *Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, *Hemispheric or Global Studies*, *Centers for the Studies of the Americas*. These new approaches were not simply reactions to the dubious nature of the title *Latin America*, but were also ways of considering the complexity of the world in the late twentieth century and new ways of knowing about the world.

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar neatly lays out six elements to consider: "Latin America is literally the world over," with immigration and the growth of Latin American populations and cultures abroad; global connections outside national polities and economies put the understanding of Latin America in a larger context; subregional groupings—such as the Caribbean, including the Anglophone and Francophone countries—stress similarities among the islands; the limited categories of the past have been superseded by new emphasis on formerly ignored groups, such as African-descended communities; new crossdisciplinary frameworks move academics to think beyond simply economics or politics and the areas those disciplines define; and new sites of knowledge, outside the university, make it possible to listen to more people involved in nongovernmental organizations and social movements, organized in sub- and supranational groupings.

Nonetheless, Escobar was writing in the *Latin American Studies Association Forum*. *Latin America* is a world regional designation that is unlikely to disappear soon.

Whatever *Latin America* originally meant, it is a designation that we should try to understand now in all its richness and complexity as a region colonized by Iberian powers and populated by indigenous, African, and European people. From its origins, it was drawn into global networks, which have become increasingly complex over time. It is a region that since the moment of conquest has been characterized by change and continuity, conflict and cooperation, multiculturalism and hybridity.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the naming of the region as Latin America a subject of debate? What arguments do you find convincing and why?
2. How has the poverty of the Latin American region been explained?
3. How has Latin American geography impacted the organization of human societies in the region?
4. How does an understanding of the historical backgrounds of the indigenous, Spanish, and African regions contribute to understanding Latin America? What similarities and differences did these contributing regions share?
5. What is the significance of race and ethnicity in Latin America?

2

From Conquest to Empire

The exploits of dashing *conquistadores* roving in search of “God, gold, and glory” stir the imagination. Childhood stories portray clever Christopher Columbus as the great adventurer, or fearless Hernando Cortés, who supposedly defeated an entire empire with but a handful of men. But the “true story,” to borrow from the account by Bernál Díaz de Castillo, is more complicated and far more intriguing. It is a story about human beings, not gods or primitives, who fought to gain or maintain position in a changing world.

The story unfolded over 300 years of imperial rule, when patterns of empire were established that would resonate throughout Latin America’s history: the creation of a hierarchical society, structured by race and ethnicity, with power and wealth in the hands of a few, and dominated from abroad.

2.1: European Exploration

The encounter of New and Old Worlds was prompted by profound changes occurring in Europe in the late 1400s. The population had finally rebounded after one-third of the populace succumbed to the Black Death, a plague that spread throughout Europe beginning in 1347. The increasing, and increasingly urbanized, population provided a larger market and greater incentives for trade. Resolution of struggles among nobles, including the Hundred Years’ War (1336–1453) and War of the Roses (1455–1487), led to consolidation of larger kingdoms, financed by merchants, who hoped the kings would create stability for local markets and relaunch foreign trade.

Their goals were furthered by new shipbuilding techniques, which allowed ships to travel longer distances, and new navigation equipment that made travel more accurate. In addition, the invention of movable type led to an increase in knowledge. The second book ever printed, after the Bible, was *Marco Polo’s Travels*. Published in 1477, the book told travel tales from 200 years earlier and piqued a renewed interest in Asian goods. Merchants dreamed of breaking the Arab and Italian monopolies of trade with Asia, thereby sharing the lucrative profits from spices, precious stones, pearls, dyes, silks, tapestries, porcelains, and rugs coveted by wealthy Europeans. The products were available via overland routes, but

these were controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which conquered Constantinople in 1453. Iberian merchants sought a route that would cut out the middleman, a water route that would take them to the East.

Portugal led the quest for new trade routes and became Europe's foremost sea power, due in part to its fortunate location on the westernmost tip of continental Europe. Most of the sparse population, less than 1 million in the fifteenth century, inhabited the coastal area, facing the great, gray, open sea and nearby Africa. The Portuguese initiated their overseas expansion in Africa in 1415 with the conquest of strategic Ceuta, guardian of the opening to the Mediterranean.

The first to appreciate fully that the ocean was not a barrier but a vast highway of commerce was Prince Henry (1394–1460), known as “the Navigator” to English writers, although he was a confirmed landlubber. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope and pointed the way to a water route to India. With Dias's success, the Portuguese were not interested in suggestions made by Christopher Columbus that a quicker route to the East could be obtained by sailing west. His timing was better when he approached Spain in 1492, just as the attention previously focused on the *reconquista* was turned to overseas expansion.

Cristobal Colón, as the Spanish called him, embodied many interests of his time. One of many Genoese living in Seville, he first went to sea as a young man, serving as a trader or clerk. A Genoese mercantile firm sent him to Portugal, where he learned maritime mapmaking. He went on to live on Madeira as the agent of a Genoese firm trading sugar and traveled the coast of Africa, learning the gold trade and observing the slave trade.

The story of Columbus is filled with myths, such as his supposedly novel idea that the world was round and that Queen Isabel pawned her jewels to finance the mission. In reality, Columbus did not need to convince any educated person that the world was round—Aristotle observed circa 300 B.C.E. that Earth cast a round shadow on the moon. The queen did not offer her jewels—in fact, the crown offered little more than recognition, 10 percent of the bounty encountered, and the title Admiral of the Ocean Seas. The crown did arrange for two ships, provided by the city of Palos as repayment of its debt to the crown. Columbus was financed primarily by Genoese merchants in Seville. He rounded up a crew and headed off in the belief that Asia was but 2,400 miles away. In actuality, the distance is 16,000 miles, with an unexpected, intervening landmass.

The return of Columbus from his first voyage intensified rivalry between Spain and Portugal. War threatened until diplomacy triumphed. At Tordesillas in 1494, representatives of the two monarchs agreed to divide the world. An imaginary line running pole to pole 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands gave Portugal everything discovered for 180 degrees east and Spain everything for 180 degrees west. Within the half of the world reserved for Portugal, Vasco da Gama discovered the long sought water route to India. His voyage in 1497–1499

joined East and West by sea for the first time. Although subsequent voyages by Columbus (1493–1496, 1498–1500, 1502–1504) suggested the extent of the lands he had found, they also proved he had not reached India.

Portugal for the moment monopolized the only sea lanes to India, and that monopoly promised to enrich the realm. The cargo that Vasco da Gama brought back to Lisbon repaid sixty times over the original cost of the expedition. But the Portuguese had not lost interest in the New World, despite the limits of the Treaty of Tordesillas. The coast of Brazil was likely explored in a clandestine voyage by Duarte Pacheco Pereira in 1498. Pereira joined the expedition of Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500, which supposedly was following da Gama's route east but was blown off course to Brazil. Some scholars believe that Cabral intentionally steered farther west to lay claim to the region, which later was determined to fall within Portugal's half of the world. Along the coasts of South America, Africa, and Asia, the Portuguese eagerly established their commercial empire, whereas the Spanish concentrated more on colonization.

2.2: Patterns of Conquest

The explorers who arrived after Columbus were not soldiers of the crown. Spain had no standing army and instead had recruited men to fight throughout the reconquista. The conquest of the New World was primarily a private venture. Companies of men outfitted themselves, borrowing money or buying supplies on credit, and would be paid with a share of the wealth they found. They were primarily literate commoners, lower-ranking professionals, and marginal *hidalgos* (noblemen), taking a chance to acquire wealth and prestige. Many had never before handled a sword. For example, among those accompanying Francisco Pizarro to conquer the Inca empire were twelve notaries and twenty-four artisans, including smiths, tailors, and carpenters.

These private undertakings were formalized by a contract, known as a *capitulación*, signed between the monarch and the aspiring conquistador, who was given the title of *adelantado*. Those contracts introduced European capitalism, as it had taken shape by the early sixteenth century, into the Americas. Royal officials accompanied all the private expeditions to ensure respect for the crown's interests and fulfillment of the *capitulación*.

The Spanish conquest proceeded as a relay system: After establishing a base in one area, the adventurers would explore farther and create new settlements, from Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) on to Cuba, Mexico, and Guatemala. The Spanish learned that there were many separate indigenous peoples; although some would rush to fight the Spanish, others would seek to aid them. The conquistadors would seize the *cacique*, or chief, and induce him to force his people to submit. The first Spaniards to arrive would divide the goods, leaving little for the later arrivals who followed to

seek their fortune. Latecomers would then move on in search of new conquests, encouraged by Spaniards and indigenous who spoke of El Dorado, the mythical golden city that lay beyond.

Hernando Cortés became perhaps the most famous conquistador, but he started out as a marginal nobleman, a notary who fled to the New World after a narrow escape from a jealous husband. He was only nineteen years old when he arrived in Hispaniola in 1504, where, through kinship connections from his native Estremadura, he acquired an *encomienda*. The *encomienda* was an institution borrowed from the reconquista, whose forces had been paid by giving them control over a group of laborers. Cortés was given a second *encomienda* after serving as Diego Velasquez's clerk during an expedition to Cuba. Velasquez became governor of Cuba, and in 1519, he chose Cortés to lead an expedition to search for the Aztec empire. He quickly reconsidered, fearing that the ambitious Cortés would not be loyal. Velasquez's fears were well-founded: Hearing he would be replaced, Cortés took off early with 600 men, sixteen horses, eleven ships, and some artillery and headed north.

It took Cortés two years to defeat the Aztec empire. After first trying to convince him to leave, the central city-states of the empire fought valiantly. But Cortés was aided by thousands of indigenous who were subjected to the Aztec imperial yoke. Similarly, the illegitimate and modestly prepared Francisco Pizarro, after three attempts, finally conquered the Inca empire in 1535, aided by conflict between brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa. Their rivalry for the Inca crown divided the empire and provided the Spanish with thousands of indigenous allies. Many also accompanied the Spanish in other conquests.

The Spanish were also aided by diseases that they unwittingly brought. Because the Americas had been isolated from contact with Europe and Africa, the inhabitants had no immunities to diseases such as plague, smallpox, and typhus; even influenza and measles claimed lives in the colonies. Multiple and overlapping epidemics killed millions. Spanish swords were mighty weapons, and horses served as the tanks of the invasion, moving people and supplies long distances, but these technologies were not as significant as disease and indigenous divisions. Spanish technology, in fact, had its limitations. Heavy armor was impressive glinting in the sunlight at the conquistadors' first approach, but it turned out to be cumbersome and hot in Tenochtitlan. The Spanish adopted the indigenous protective clothing of thick cotton padding, which was lighter, cooler, and effective against the obsidian blade technology of the indigenous.

The Spanish pattern of exploration and settlement changed after 1521, the year not only of Cortés's triumph but also of the circumnavigation of the globe, begun by Ferdinand Magellan in 1519 and successfully concluded by Juan Sebastián del Cano. He proved that Asia could be reached by sailing west, but his expedition around South America also proved that the westward passage was longer and more difficult than the African route used by the Portuguese. In time, Spain realized it did not need the route to India. Conquered Mexico

Table 2.1 Years when Major New World Cities were founded

Founding of Major New World Cities	Year
Havana	1519
Mexico City	1521
Quito	1534
Lima	1535
Buenos Aires	1536, refounded 1580
Asunción	1537
Bogotá	1538
Santiago	1541

revealed that the New World held far more wealth in the form of coveted gold and silver than the Spaniards could hope to reap from trade with Asia. Instead of viewing the New World as a mere way station en route to Asia, the Spanish made America their center of attention.

The rest of the New World civilizations fell rapidly to the Spanish: Within half a century after Columbus's discovery, Spanish *adelantados* had explored and claimed the territory from approximately 40 degrees north—Oregon, Colorado, and the Carolinas—to 40 degrees south—mid-Chile and Argentina—with the exception of the Brazilian coast. Reflecting the Spanish preference for urban living, by 1550 the settlers had already founded all of Latin America's major cities. Meanwhile, the Portuguese largely ignored Brazil from its "discovery" in 1500 until 1532. Feeling pressured by Spanish and French interests, the crown authorized Martim Afonso de Sousa to found the first town, São Vicente, near present-day Santos. But the Portuguese followed patterns they established in Africa, focusing more on trading forts than colonization.

Legend has given the conquistadores glory for the conquest, but in reality they ended their lives with far less prestige. Columbus was returned to Spain in chains, accused of misgovernment. He spent the last months before his death trying to gain money and honors that he claimed he had been promised. Cortés, too, died in Spain complaining that his power had been preempted by the viceroy and arguing with local officials over the outrageous size of his *encomienda*. Pizarro was assassinated by followers of his former partner, Diego de Almagro, who felt that Almagro had been cheated out of his share of the wealth. Despite their achievements and outsized reputations, they were not significant in the establishment of stable, long-lasting colonies. In fact, their supposed feats of derring-do would not have been possible without the much more prosaic role of the merchants, who advanced the money and supplies to finance expeditions and support colonies. One merchant, Hernando de Castro, complained in 1520 that because of the power struggle between "this Cortés" and Cuban Governor Velasquez, "it is clearly no time to do business." And business was the point of conquest and colonization.

2.3: Colonial Economy

Expeditions to the New World were economic enterprises for both the crown and the conquistadores. Spain operated under an economic system known as mercantilism, which held that national wealth and power were built by controlling trade and gathering bullion. The goal was for the empire to sell more than it bought, keeping bullion in the kingdom's coffers. The adventurers who headed to the New World were equally motivated by wealth. As Bernál Díaz, chronicler of the Aztec conquest, commented: "We came here to serve God and also to get rich." Economic interest involved finding not only a marketable product, particularly mineral wealth, but also agricultural products. Control over labor and land were crucial to these economic enterprises. And finally, as a colonial enterprise, the crown would try to strictly control trade through monopolies.

The Americas at first frustrated the Iberians. The Taino/Arawak people of the Caribbean and the Tupí of the Brazilian coast showed no interest in transoceanic trade. The Portuguese contented themselves for three decades with exporting the brazilwood found growing close to the coast. The Spaniards lacked even that product to stimulate commerce in the Caribbean.

The Iberians focused on the search for a single item: gold. It offered three attractive advantages: easy shipment, imperishability, and high value. Columbus wrote, "O, most excellent gold! Who has gold has a treasure with which he gets what he wants, imposes his will on the world and even helps souls to paradise." The Portuguese encountered little of it in Brazil, but the Spaniards came into limited but tantalizing contact with the prized metal almost at once, as the Taino displayed some golden ornaments. The Taino also spoke of gold on various Caribbean islands, causing the Spaniards to begin a feverish search for deposits. The Spanish forced the indigenous to bring in quotas of gold; if they failed, the Spaniards cut off their hands. Nonetheless, only modest amounts of gold were found. Between 1501 and 1519, the Caribbean produced approximately 8 million pesos of gold.

The principal source of gold in Spanish America was New Granada (Colombia), which by 1600 had exported more than 4 million ounces of gold. Most of that gold came from placer deposits worked by slave labor. Production grew steadily, with eighteenth-century production nearly tripling that of the sixteenth, for a total supply of about 30 million ounces of gold.

In Brazil, the hardy *bandeirantes* (explorers) found gold for the first time in 1695 in the interior of Minas Gerais, followed by Mato Grosso in 1721 and Goiás in 1726. Such discoveries were incentives to open the vast southern interior of Brazil to settlement. Each discovery precipitated a wild rush of people eager to seek their fortunes. The boom caused notable population growth in eighteenth-century Brazil and a population shift from the older sugar-producing region of the Northeast to the newly opened regions of the Southeast. During the eighteenth century, Brazil produced 32 million ounces of gold, a majority of the world's supply.

Most of Spain's wealth, however, came not from gold but from silver. Spaniards found silver in New Spain at Taxco (1534), Zacatecas (1546), Guanajuato (1550), and San Luis Potosí (1592). In the sixteenth century, New Spain shipped more than 35 million pesos worth of precious metals to Spain, becoming Spanish America's leading producer toward the end of the seventeenth century. The single richest mine was discovered in 1545 at Potosí, a remote area in mountainous Upper Peru (later Bolivia). Collectively, these mines produced some 100,000 tons of silver during the colonial period. The crown carefully collected their *quinto*, or one-fifth, of the precious metals, employing large bureaucracies to oversee their interests.

Mining exemplified the region's dependence on exports. The crowns were hungry for gold and silver, but more than that, they were hungry for wealth. In areas without gold and silver, Iberians and their descendants searched for other exportable goods. They sent to Iberia—and on to Europe—the rich purplish-blue dye made from the indigo plant and the deep red dye, *cochineal*, made from the insects feeding on nopal cactuses. The hides of New World cattle made fine leather goods. Cacao beans fed the new desire for chocolate, sweetened by New World sugar. Success depended on the resources provided by geography and by perhaps the greatest wealth of the colonies—the labor force to produce the goods.

In search of a workable labor system, Spaniards looked to their own traditions. Seeing the conquest of the New World as a continuation of the reconquista, they transferred the *encomienda*, or entrustment, once used to control and exploit the Moors. The institution required the Spanish *encomendero* to instruct the indigenous entrusted to him in Christianity and to protect them. In return, he could demand tribute and labor.

The crown hesitated to approve the *encomienda*, strengthening a class of *encomenderos* who could impose their will between the monarchs and their new indigenous subjects. Isabel in 1501 ordered the governor of the Indies to free the indigenous, but when that experiment resulted in indigenous refusal to work for the Spaniards, the queen changed her mind. The monarchs tried repeatedly to control the *encomienda*. A 1503 royal edict institutionalized the *encomienda* but also expressed concern about indigenous welfare. In 1513, King Ferdinand promulgated the Laws of Burgos, calling for humane treatment, a policy difficult to enforce. Charles I tried to abolish the *encomienda* in 1519, but the edict was ignored. The New Laws of 1542 forbade indigenous enslavement and compulsory personal service, stopped inheritance of *encomiendas*, and proscribed new assignments. But the colonists protested vehemently: Rebellion threatened New Spain, and in Peru, *encomenderos* rose up to defy the law. The monarch acquiesced, modifying some laws and revoking others.

The *encomienda* system was most effective among sedentary indigenous populations, accustomed to participating in draft rotary labor systems in the Aztec empire (*coatequitl*) and the Inca (*mita*). Where no such indigenous base existed, Spaniards simply could not establish the *encomienda*. This was apparent

in Zacatecas, when the Spanish tried to induce northern indigenous groups, such as the nonsedentary Chichimec, to work in the silver mines.

Because nothing could be done without labor, the *encomiendas* were highly prized. But while Cortés's *encomiendas* numbered 100,000, latecomers and lower-ranking conquistadores were less fortunate. For example, Bartolomé García wrote plaintively to the crown that in Paraguay he was given sixteen Guaraní workers, located some eighty leagues away, "from where one can get no service." Where there were semisedentary people—Tucumán, Paraguay, and Chile north of the Bío Bío River—the Spaniards devised a modified *encomienda* system by integrating with the indigenous people, forming a kinship group and becoming their leaders.

The *encomienda* was weakened by two trends—moral opprobrium and demographic pressure. The crown received reports from the Church that *encomenderos* abused their indigenous charges. One of the most vocal defenders of the indigenous was Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican missionary and later bishop. His persuasive arguments contributed to Pope Paul III's 1537 bull declaring that the indigenous were fully capable of receiving the faith of Christ—that is, they possessed souls and should not be deprived of their liberty and property.

But moral concerns did not weaken the *encomienda* as much as the demographic pressure of continued immigration and demand for labor. Perhaps one in fifty Spaniards who came to the colonies was awarded *encomiendas*. But immigrants continued to come, inspired by letters *encomenderos* wrote home about their success. Melchor Verdugo wrote from Peru in 1536, "[I have] a very good *encomienda* of Indians, with about eight or ten thousand vassals; I think there's never a year that they don't give me 5,000 or 6,000 pesos in income."

Replacing the *encomienda* was the *repartimiento*, the temporary allotment of indigenous workers for a given task. The Spanish colonist in need of laborers applied to a royal official explaining the work to be done, the time it would take to complete, and the specific number of indigenous it would require. In theory, the crown officials ensured fair payment and satisfactory working conditions; in practice, abuse abounded. Planters and miners constantly badgered or bribed royal officials to bend the system, which flourished from about 1550 to 1650.

In addition to furnishing an agricultural labor force, the *repartimiento* system also provided the major share of workers for the mines in South America. In the Viceroyalty of Peru, the *mita* at Potosí became particularly burdensome. All adult male Quechua and Aymara were subject to serve in the *mita* one year out of every seven. Far from home, the miner worked under dangerous conditions and earned a wage insufficient for half of his own and his family's expenses.

As in Spanish America, landowners in Brazil relied in part on the indigenous as a source of labor. Some employed indigenous labor from the *aldeias*, the villages created by the crown and religious orders to concentrate the nomadic populations. Protected within the village, they were introduced to Christianity

and European civilization. In return, they gave a portion of their labor to the Church and State. This part of the *aldeia* system resembled the *encomienda*. In addition, planters could apply to the *aldeia* administrators for paid indigenous workers to perform a specific task for a specified period of time, similar to the *repartimiento*. But the *aldeia* system included only a small percentage of Brazil's mostly nonsedentary indigenous people.

The existence of a sedentary indigenous workforce was a key difference between labor organization in Brazil and in Spanish America. Because the Tupí died off or fled to remote areas, the Portuguese turned to the source they used on the island of Madeira—African slaves. Africans offered the added benefit of immunity to European diseases because of the many years of contact. By the end of the sixteenth century, Africa furnished most of the productive labor in Brazil and the West Indies. Brazil and Spanish America received nearly 60 percent of the Atlantic slave trade.

Although most slaves worked in sugar production first in Brazil and eventually in Cuba and Haiti, slaves were not limited to these areas. African slaves were the backbone of Latin America's skilled labor force: artisans, muleteers, herdsman, and skilled labor at the mines. Africans also were important as cowboys, particularly in Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina. Urban slaves also worked as domestic servants, peddlers, mechanics, and artisans, particularly for their skilled ironwork.

Justifications for slavery included the idea that slaves were captured in just wars, or that slavery was a small price to pay for Christianization. Even Las Casas initially welcomed African slavery as preferable to enslaving the indigenous, although by the 1520s, Las Casas renounced his earlier advocacy. There were some moral qualms about African enslavement; as Alonso Montúfar, archbishop of Mexico City wrote to King Philip II in 1560: "We do not know of any cause why the Negroes should be captives any more than the Indians, since we are told that they receive the Gospel in good will and do not make war on Christians." The Spanish wrestled with the issue for decades, but in the end, economic and political interest won over morality. The Council of the Indies assured Charles II, after a review of slave-trade policy in 1685, "There cannot be any doubt as to the necessity of these slaves for the support of the kingdoms of the Indies, and . . . to the importance of the public welfare of continuing and maintaining the procedure without change."

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, many African slave-owning societies preferred to own women, who had primary responsibility for agriculture and 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 performing 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.