CONCISE HISTORY OF THE MODERN WORLD

A HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

1800 TO THE PRESENT

Third Edition

TERESA A. MEADE

WILEY Blackwell

A History of Modern Latin America

Concise History of the Modern World

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1800 to the Present

THIRD EDITION

Teresa A. Meade

WILEY Blackwell

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For the best sister ever
Martha G. Meade (1957–2012)

Contents

List of Figures

List of Maps

Preface to the Third Edition

In the painting on the cover of this third edition of *A History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present*, Mayan artist Diego Isaias Hernandez Mendez shows desperate people clinging to rooftops, trees, floating sheets of corrugated tin, scraps of debris, and each other as floodwaters engulf them. While fictional, the painting could as easily be depicting a real life event, and maybe it is. Entitled "*Disastres Naturales por Cambios Climaticos en Guatemala*" (Natural Disasters Caused by Climate Changes in Guatemala), the painting is one in a series from Isaias whose "subjects cover the small mishaps of daily life to horrific natural disasters" (artemaya.com/galisa.php). Ironically, natural disasters have become nearly as commonplace in Central America as the mishaps of daily life. Isaias's gallery features works depicting the destruction from tropical storms Stan in 2005 and Agatha in 2010, and torrential rains caused by the short-lived but devastating 2011 cyclone 12E in Guatemala, interspersed among scenes of an accident involving a dog, a scene of road kill resulting from opossums in the road, and an image of joyful children in a game of sliding. His most elaborate painting is a chaotic mélange of adults, children, animals, and buildings being tossed about on land and sea, entitled "Natural Disaster Signaling the Changing Climate in the Maya World."

In his art Isaias shows a reality that many in the United States seek to ignore: climate change is real and its effects are killing and displacing some of the poorest people in the hemisphere. Given no other recourse, and for the most part having contributed little themselves to warming the planet, the people of Central America are forced to leave their homelands and head north. The effects of climate change are not new; reports exist back into the twentieth century that show mass migrations due to drought and inclement weather episodes. Migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean are following a historical playbook. Many European immigrants came to America in the nineteenth century because of disastrous climatic events at home: drought in Southern Italy, crop failures in Northern Europe, and, most spectacularly, the potato famine in Ireland that forced millions of Irish peasants to emigrate, the majority to the United States. Interestingly, the Irish – Catholic and impoverished – were met with hostility from the dominant Protestant elite, just as the

current batch of refugees from the poorest countries of the hemisphere, and the world, are finding the doors of Europe and the United States slammed in their faces.

After two devastating hurricanes, Eta and Iota, in late 2020, over 10,000 people attempted to migrate north. The hurricanes struck the coast of Nicaragua within 15 miles of each other, two weeks apart. The storms displaced 600,000 Hondurans and, along with rains and flooding, affected 6 million people. According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, the decade-long drought that has destroyed 80 percent of the crops in the "Dry Corridor" that stretches from southern Mexico to Costa Rica has caused 3.5 million people to live in food insecurity. Migrants interviewed on the road to Mexico and the US border report that they have no means of supporting their families or keeping them safe. The effects of climate change have driven them off the land and into cities where drug gangs and violence leave few untouched. In 2019 the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that climate-change-based disasters have displaced 24 million people across the globe, affecting Latin America, southern Africa, and south Asia the most. Weather conditions that have always existed have worsened. For example, 2020 had the largest number of Atlantic hurricanes on record, striking areas of the Caribbean and the Central American isthmus that were already enduring poverty, crime, and hunger.

Along with accelerated climate change, another difference in many Latin American countries has been a decline in state-sponsored welfare programs for the general population. These programs were the hallmark of the Pink Tide reform governments of the late twentieth century. In the past decade, a number of the progressive governments have been replaced by right-wing populists, most notably the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Bolsonaro's ultra-rightist rhetoric and incompetent handling of the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 600,000 Brazilian people from early 2020 to 2022 (so far) has damaged his chances of winning re-election in late 2022. At this writing Bolsonaro's own health problems may prevent him from seeking another term. In two notable cases, Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega and Venezuela under Nicolas Maduro, progressive leaders adopted authoritarian methods, severely undercutting the leftist gains of the Sandinistas in the case of Nicaragua or the Bolivarian Missions of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) and Alberto Fernández in Argentina moderated their reform policies, especially as they compromised with the debt-servicing demands of international capital. Signs of popular discontent with authoritarian regimes are visible in several countries that have rejected conservative candidates for leftists: Xiomara Castro, the first woman president of Honduras, who has proposed a universal basic income for poor families; Luis Arce who won office in Bolivia as a candidate of the leftist MAS party founded by Evo Morales; and Gustavo Petro, a former member of the urban guerrilla movement is favored to become president of Colombia. The most decided leftist victory was in Chile, where Gabriel Boric, a socialist, roundly defeated the far-right candidate, José Antonio Kast, in the December 2021 run-off. Capturing 56 percent of the vote, the 36-year-old former student leader set forth an ambitious program of attacking income inequality, advancing social programs and rights for women, and protecting Chile's natural environment. The contrast between Boric and Bolsonaro could hardly be starker.

In terms of future prospects, Latin American economies are facing the dilemma of economic dependency on the export of agricultural and mineral commodities to the

insatiable Chinese market, while upholding environmental standards. Scientists point to the destruction of animal habitats, namely the depletion of the tropical rainforests (especially the Amazon), as a key factor in the COVID-19 pandemic. Coronaviruses spread in the jump from animals to humans, a process that has grown exponentially in the past few decades as tropical habitats have been decimated. Not only is the source of the pandemic fully understood as a part of human-caused climate change, but the solution as well relies on human agency. The future of Latin America, and indeed the planet, considering the immense forest and jungles in both countries, will hinge on whose vision wins out over the next decades. Climate change affects the poorer countries, and the poorest areas within those countries, far more than the wealthier, energy-squandering societies. The inequality is everywhere, and unless addressed, concertedly and intelligently, the balance between rich and poor, between the United States and Europe and the Global South, will become impossible to manage.

After an introductory summary of the history of the most recognizable features of Latin American politics, economics, culture, and society, we turn to a brief overview of the state of affairs in Latin America on the eve of crucial wars of independence. Our understanding of the birth of the republics that today make up the hemisphere begins with a background of the wars of independence. It is the argument of this text that the struggle to win freedom from the colonial masters tore open the various societies and laid bare the disastrous state of inequality. Historians of the Americas in general have been grappling with the importance of various factors, including the emancipation of enslaved Afro-descendants, the ongoing suppression of the human and civil rights of indigenous peoples, and the push and pull of accommodating European settlers who sought to settle the land and build the towns and cities of the continents. This history has too often been viewed in static stages: colonization, defeat and containment of the indigenous people, the eventual struggle to emancipate the slaves brought from Africa, and then the struggle to accommodate the conflicting and fragmented societies and build a cohesive whole. Scholars are more recently reconsidering the role of the enslaved and the intersection of racial and ethnic cultures in the formation of multilayered societies.

The history of Latin America in this text begins with an overview of European colonialism, laying the groundwork for the succeeding chapters on the history of the independent nation-states. Presenting such a history is not easy: Latin America is immense and diverse; events that have a huge impact on one nation or region (such as the US war with Mexico in the 1840s) may affect others only tangentially, or not at all. While a textbook should present a broad, general interpretation that makes sense of many disparate details and events, it is impossible to explore fully each and every event undergirding the big picture. Another inevitable tension is chronology (time) versus topics, as well as time versus place (country or region). Since historical events build on and grow out of whatever comes before, and lead into and influence that which comes after, examining one happening or individual in its broader context is difficult. For students accustomed to tracing the development of one nation, even one as vast and diverse as the United States, juggling the information on dozens of diverse countries in Latin America and the Caribbean seems near impossible.

Historians must always grapple with this dilemma of presentation: the author can stick to certain themes and relay a general analysis fitted roughly into a chronology or,

alternatively, can relate the history of one country, or group of countries, one at a time. The country-by-country approach is often more precise, but difficult to use in the standard history class, while covering many nations in one fell swoop can become confusing. Ultimately neither approach succeeds if the end product is stripped of the fascinating stories of people and events that make up the overall narrative.

This book relies on many texts, monographs, document sets, and journalistic and fictional portrayals of Latin America's rich history. Since it is confusing, if even possible, to try to cover everything that took place, historians routinely sift through a mountain of facts and evidence to come up with the best representative example. One event serves as the archetypical illustration of wider trends. For example, a discussion of Argentina's labor movement is used to reflect the struggle between workers and owners that unfolded under specific conditions but also took place in many countries. Labor in other areas is then covered in broad strokes, with the assumption that readers and instructors will draw on other examples to fill in the historical blanks. Historical events and trends – such as the slave revolt in Haiti, the patriarchal rules governing marriage in Brazil, construction of the Panama Canal, or the Mexican Revolution – are explained according to this interpretive approach. The seemingly unconnected events in the histories of Latin American societies make up an account that is more than the sum of its parts; rather the parts, selected for their explanatory value, help us understand the whole. Thus I present examples of what transpired in a single nation at a specific time as representative of wider phenomena that serve as a window into the ideas, conflicts, social movements, cultural trends, and ascribed meanings that have made an appearance on Latin America's historical landscape.

Even early in my teaching career, which ultimately spanned over 30 years, mainly in a small liberal arts college, it was apparent that students are better able to grasp the big picture when given smaller, concrete incidents to illustrate broader interpretations. Relying solely on "big theories" and moving from country to country and event to event makes students' eyes glaze over, and note-taking turns to doodling. Blame could be placed on poor training in geography, the ethnocentrism of US society, the Internet, or what have you, but the truth remains that we often develop our understanding of history by building out from a specific example or single historical event.

Finally, history is based on original sources. The particular interpretation historians elicit from those sources, even the conflicting conclusions they derive after looking at the same or similar documents, is the heart and soul of the enterprise. Interspersed throughout this narrative are first-hand accounts, documents, and excerpts from fiction, displayed in sidebars, or boxes. These boxes have two purposes: on the one hand, they can serve as the basis of discussion in a class; on the other, they demonstrate the kinds of materials historians draw on to construct the most informed version of what transpired. Although I am well aware that readers sometimes skip over this additional material, seeing it as extraneous to the text, I am hopeful that instructors and students will pause to examine an original document, a quirky historical fact, or a literary reflection. Often it is a particular story that remains with us. The historian Julius Scott proposed that stories passed among common folk, enslaved and free persons in ports of the Caribbean, planted the seeds for far-flung slave uprisings. Newspapers and letters matter for our understanding of the communications of the elite, but the illiterate also accessed

information through a myriad of informal networks. And, when reliant on direct contact, news passed quickly.[1]

In addition to these first-hand accounts, I have woven in both historical and sometimes fictional asides from various authors, including the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano. Galeano compiled a three-volume "based on fact" fictional interpretation of major events in the history of the Americas from the pre-Columbian period to the late twentieth century. He did this, he anthropomorphized, because "Poor History had stopped breathing: betrayed in academic texts, lied about in classrooms, drowned in dates, they had imprisoned her in museums and buried her, with floral wreaths, beneath statuary bronze and monumental marble."[2] As a historian and teacher, I naturally beg to differ a bit with his conclusion, since those of us who teach and write strive to present history as a lively narrative, not dull facts drowned in dates. However, Galeano is right when he exhorts us to rescue history from hero worship and to question the sources, since neither they, nor the facts they present, "speak for themselves." In his trilogy *Memory of Fire,* Galeano freely and provocatively writes the history of the Americas and creates a fanciful narrative of the past, which sometimes misses the mark but more often nails it precisely.

In the end, we are all interpreters of history, trying to make sense of our own past and our place within the era in which we are living; and for that we rely on books and the explanations contained within them. Although this *History of Modern Latin America* is a very small contribution to that daunting enterprise, I hope readers will find this chronicle of Latin America's past interesting, the explanation of that history understandable and enlightening, and the interpretation challenging. History should be nothing less.

Notes

1 Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2018).

2 Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: 1 Genesis*, Cedric Belfrage, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. xv.

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Because the process of writing a textbook draws on the expertise of an entire profession, I have benefited from the research of the many scholars who have explored, analyzed, photographed, mapped, and charted the history of Latin America. Compiling

a narrative from so many fine books, articles, web pages, newsletters, blogs, and news articles was both an inspiring and humbling experience. The scholarship on Latin America is truly impressive; I hope this book conveys in a small way the wealth of contributions from scholars in the United States, Europe, and throughout Latin America.

On a more personal level, I want to thank my son and daughter, Darren and Claire, and my husband, Andor Skotnes, for their expertise with web pages, photographs, and other technical assistance. Andor helped me update illustrations and more than once left his own work as a historian to answer my cry of distress when my computer tried to sabotage this whole enterprise. Finally, it is with great sadness that I acknowledge the premature death of my sister and best friend, Martha Meade. Having worked for years in an urban high school teaching history to students who traced their roots to and spoke the languages of Latin America and many lands of the world, my sister used this knowledge to provide excellent comments on the first edition. The carelessness of a highway driver robbed the world of a dedicated history teacher, and for those of us who knew her well, of a wonderful friend and family member. I dedicate this edition to her.

1 Introduction to the Land and Its People

Latin America is a vast, geographically and culturally diverse region stretching from the southern border of the United States to Puerto Toro at the tip of Chile, the southernmost town of the continent. Encompassing over 8 million square miles, the 20 countries and 13 dependencies, or 33 national entities, that make up Latin America are home to an estimated 650 million people who converse in at least five European-based languages and six or more main indigenous tongues, plus African Creole and hundreds of smaller language groups.

Historians disagree over the origin of the name "Latin America." Some contend that geographers in the sixteenth century gave the name "Latin America" to the new lands Spain and Portugal colonized, in reference to the Latin-based languages imposed on indigenous people and enslaved Africans imported to the newly acquired territories. Others have argued that the name originated in France in the 1860s under the reign of Napoleon III, as a result of that country's short-lived attempt to fold all the Latin-language-derived countries of the Americas into a neocolonial empire. Although other European powers (Britain, Holland, and Denmark) colonized parts of the Americas, the term "Latin America" generally refers to those territories in which the main spoken language is Spanish or Portuguese: Mexico, most of Central and South America, and the Caribbean countries of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. The former French possessions of Haiti and other islands of the Caribbean, French Guiana on the South American continent, and even Quebec in Canada, could be included in a broadened definition of Latin America. However, this book defines Latin America as the region that fell under Spanish and Portuguese domination beginning in the late fifteenth and into the mid-sixteenth centuries. The definition also encompasses other Caribbean and South American

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countries such as Haiti and Jamaica among others, since events in those areas are important to the historical trajectory. This definition follows the practice of area scholars, who have generally defined Latin America and the Caribbean as a socially and economically interrelated entity, no matter what language or culture predominates. It in no way implies that "Latin America" is a homogeneous culture, geography, or people.

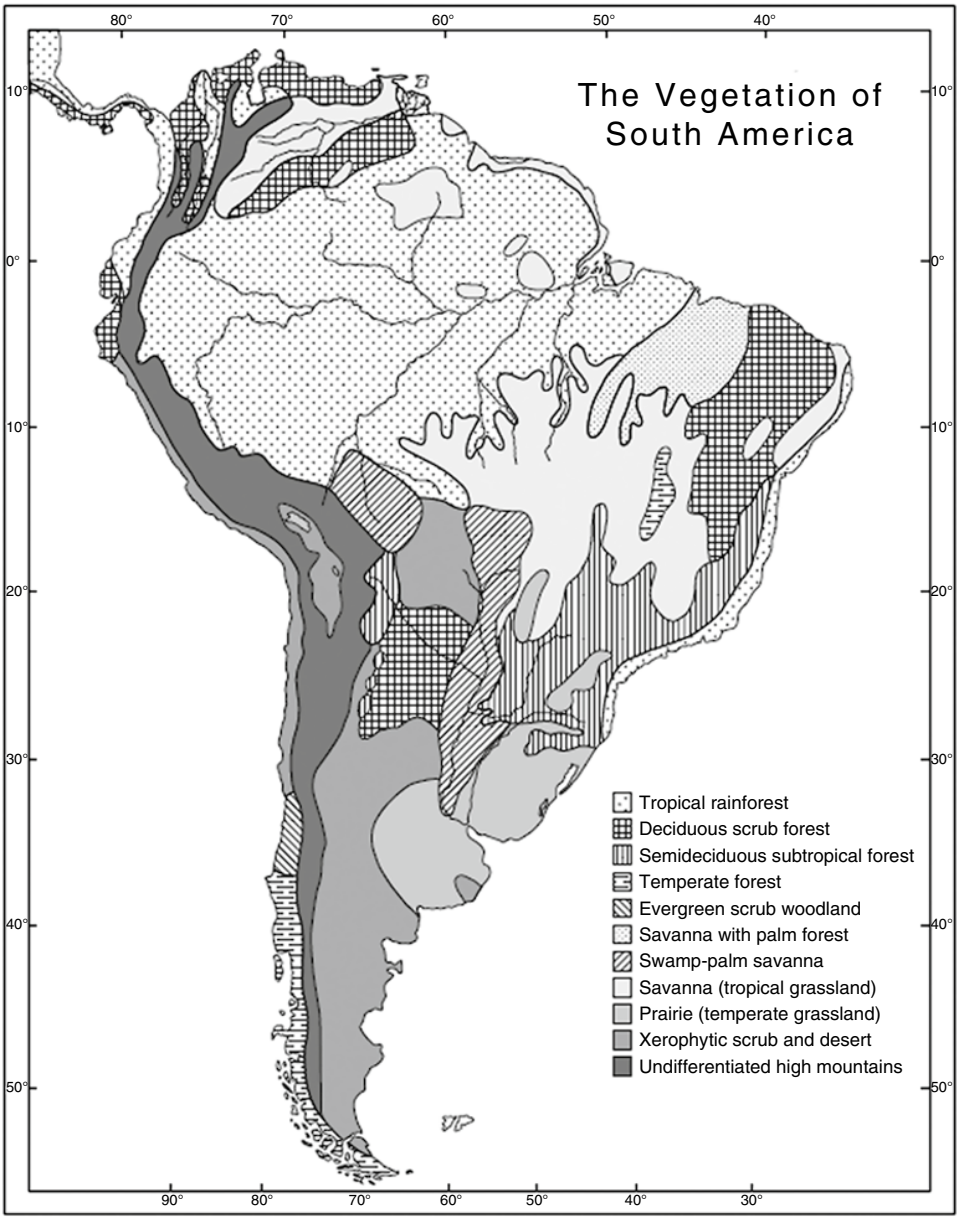
Geography

Latin America boasts some of the largest cities in the world, including São Paulo (Brazil), Mexico City, Buenos Aires (Argentina), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Lima (Peru), and Bogotá (Colombia). Population figures, however, are controversial since most of these gigantic urban centers include, in addition to the housed and settled population, transitory masses of destitute migrants living in makeshift dwellings or in the open air. It is hard for census takers and demographers to obtain an accurate count, or offer a more precise estimate, under those circumstances.

Not only does Latin America have some of the largest population centers in the world, but its countryside, forests, mountains, and coastlines are major geographical and topographical landmarks (see Map 1.1). The 2.6-million-square-mile Amazon Basin is the largest rainforest in the world. Spanning the far north of Brazil, stretching into Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela, it is home for approximately 15 percent of all living species on the planet. South and to the east of the Amazon Basin in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso lays the Pantanal, the world's largest wetlands. Other superlatives include the Andes as the highest mountain range of the Americas and the longest range in the world, stretching nearly the entire length of the continent. This geologically young and very seismically active range includes Aconcagua in Argentina on the border with Chile, the highest peak in the Americas, which at 22,841 feet exceeds Denali in Alaska by over 2,000 feet. The Atacama Desert, spanning Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, is the driest place and the largest depository of sodium nitrates on the planet. Elsewhere in the Andean region is Lake Titicaca, the most elevated navigable body of water in the world. This huge lake forms the boundary between Peru and Bolivia, and the Bolivian city of La Paz is the world's highest-altitude capital city. Angel Falls in Venezuela is the highest waterfall in the world; at 3,212 feet it is almost 20 times higher than Niagara Falls. Angel Falls connects through tributaries to the world's largest river (in volume), the Amazon. In its 25,000 miles of navigable water, this mighty "River Sea," as the Amazon River is called, contains 16 percent of the world's river water and 20 percent of the fresh water on Earth.

People

The sheer diversity of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean has made the region extremely interesting culturally, but has also affected the level of economic and political equality. Latin America is exceedingly diverse, a place where the interaction,



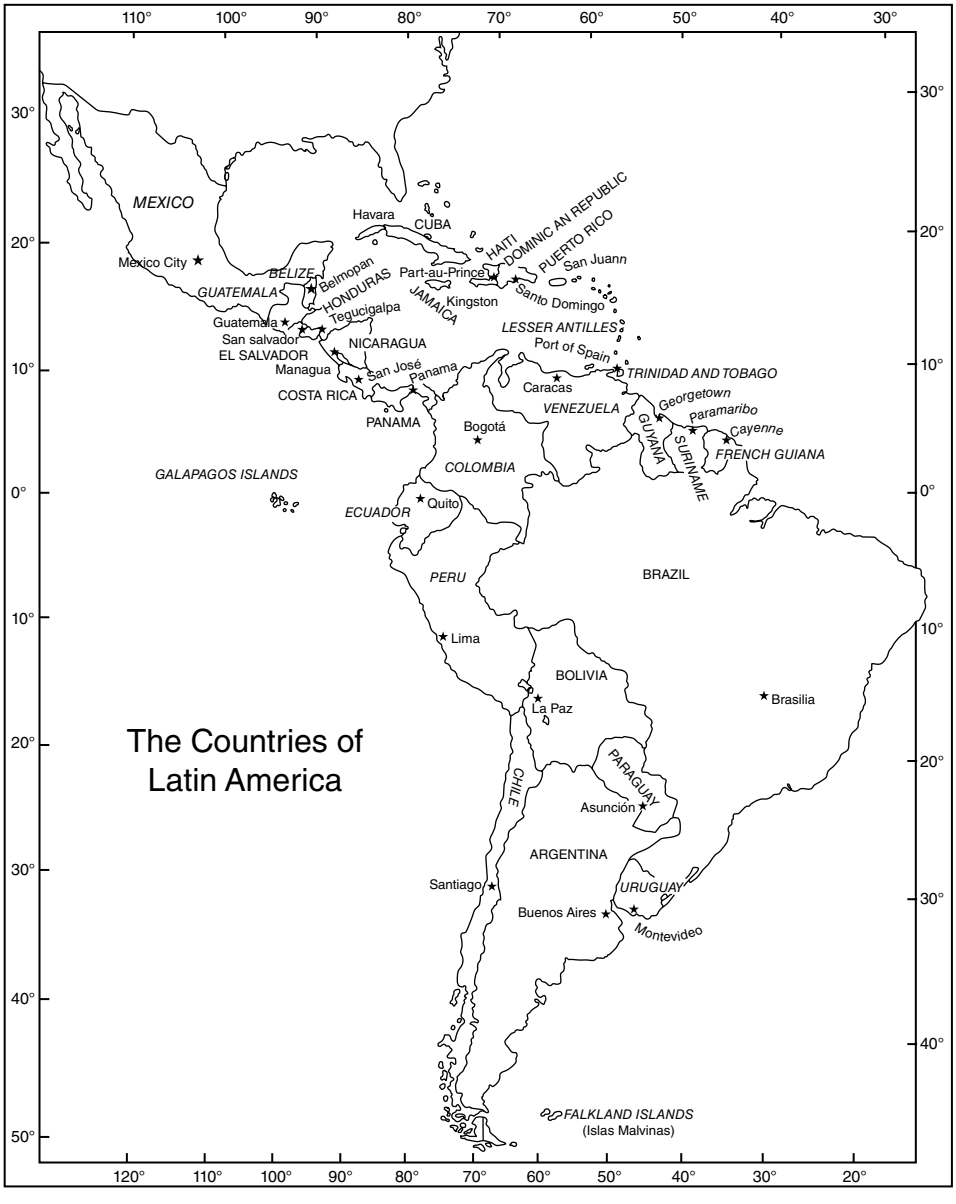
Map 1.1 The vegetation of South America. (Courtesy Cathryn L. Lombardi and John V. Lombardi, *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas*, © 1993 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reprinted by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.)

cross-fertilization, mutation, interpenetration, and reinvention of cultures from Europe, Asia, Africa, and indigenous America have produced a lively and rich set of traditions in music, art, literature, religion, sport, dance, and political and economic trends. Bolivia, for example, elected an indigenous president in 2005 who was a former coca leaf

farmer. President Evo Morales won easily with the backing of poor and indigenous Bolivians but met hostility from wealthy and middle-class citizens who feared the effects of his socialist redistribution proposals and followed more "Western" traditions. Morales defeated a recall in 2008 and went on to be re-elected by landslides in 2009 and 2014. In a situation reflecting growing tensions in other countries over extractive development projects, Morales in subsequent terms in office has come under fire from environmentalists and even some indigenous supporters for his embrace of foreign oil and natural gas exploration in formerly protected areas. A right-wing opposition forced Morales's resignation in 2019, but his party has since returned to power. Thus ethnic and racial strife has accompanied the push to develop resources more than 500 years past the original fifteenth-century encounter. (See Map 1.2.)

In Bolivia, Guatemala, and Peru, people who trace their ethnicity back to the pre-Columbian era constitute the majority, or near majority, while in Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Venezuela, people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, known as *mestizos*, or in parts of Central America as *ladinos*, comprise the majority in most regions. Enslaved Africans were imported from the sixteenth until the mid-nineteenth centuries, and their descendants still comprise over half of the population in many areas. People in the Caribbean islands of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, as well as in many South American nations, especially Brazil, Colombia, parts of Venezuela, Peru, and other countries are descendants of a mixture of Africans and Europeans, called mulattos or Afro-descendants, a more appropriate term that implies heritage rather than skin color. Blacks, or Afro-descendants, are in the majority in Haiti and in many of the Caribbean nations that were in the hands of the British, Dutch, French, or other colonial powers. Recent scholarship, moreover, has revealed that enslaved Africans, and their descendants, were brought to every part of Latin America. Everywhere in Latin America there is evidence of racial mixture, giving rise to the term *casta*, technically meaning lineage in Spanish, but that came to identify any person whose ancestors were from all three major ethnic groups: indigenous, European, and African. Although this has a pejorative connotation in some regions, the creation of such a term suggests that racial mixture in Latin America is so extensive as to make it often awkward, and imprecise, to list each combination. This book uses all of these designations, including indigenous and Indian, interchangeably, since that is yet the standard practice in the literature of the major languages of the region.

Large numbers of Europeans immigrated to Latin America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to the majority who came from Spain, Portugal, and Italy, immigrants arrived from France, Germany, Poland, Russia, and the Middle Eastern countries of Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon; a large number of Eastern European and German Jews sought refuge in Latin America before, during, and in the years immediately after World War II. Many European migrants settled in the Southern Cone countries of Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and the southernmost region of Brazil. Japanese also immigrated to Brazil, especially to São Paulo, where they were resettled on coffee plantations and eventually moved into urban areas to form the largest community of Japanese outside Japan. In addition, Japanese moved in large numbers to Peru, while Koreans and Chinese migrated to every part of Latin America. Chinese and East Indians



Map 1.2 The countries of Latin America. (Courtesy Cathryn L. Lombardi and John V. Lombardi, *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas*, © 1993 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reprinted by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.)

were brought as indentured servants to many of the countries of the Caribbean region beginning in the nineteenth and extending into the twentieth century.

Because race in Latin America was from the earliest days of the arrival of Europeans identified along a continuum from indigenous and Black at one end to white Europeans at the other, any discussion of racial categories has been very complicated. By contrast,

Table 1.1 Racial identities of the population of Latin Americans.

Identified as	Percent of total
White	36.1
Mestizo	30.3
Mulatto	20.3
Indigenous	9.2
Black	3.2
Asian	0.7
Other/unknown	0.2

Source: World Bank, 2021. Indicative of the fluidity of racial/ethnic identity, percentages in given categories vary across sources.

the United States largely enforced a system of bipolar identity inherited from British colonialism, which then solidified in the late nineteenth century after the Civil War. Nonetheless, race everywhere is socially constructed. For example, it is estimated that, unknowingly, half, or more, of those who identify in the United States as African American have some white ancestors, and many whites are descended from Africans and indigenous people. Throughout the Americas race is a conflicted category. Many Latin Americans who identify as white, and are seen as white because of their social status, education, and physical features, might not be considered white in the United States and vice versa. There are any number of stories of Black South American diplomats who were outraged when they encountered discrimination in Washington, DC, but not because they objected to racial profiling; they considered themselves white. The most recent World Bank publications estimate a total population of 652,276,325 in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. More than a third are defined as white; less than a third as mestizo (mixed white and Indian); 20 percent as mulatto/Afro-descendant (mixed white and African); 9.2 percent as indigenous/Indian; 3 percent as Black; less than 1 percent as Asian; with the remaining as other/unknown. (See Table 1.1.)

While exact figures are hard to determine, we can draw several conclusions, the most salient of which is that people who are wholly or partially of indigenous, African, and Asian ancestry predominate in Latin America. Certainly no discrimination against a minority should be tolerated anywhere, but in Latin America it bears remembering that the history of discrimination is against the *majority* population, not the minority. Demographers point out that such will be the case in North America by the end of the current century, and is already in California. Secondly, whereas indigenous people constitute a minority in most countries, people of whole or partial indigenous ancestry comprise the single largest ethnic/racial group in Latin America as a whole.

Economies

Nature has graced Latin America with plentiful natural resources and stunning environmental landmarks, but the gains achieved through human interaction are not all positive since huge numbers of its people are impoverished, while a small group in each country is