

LATIN AMERICA

An Interpretive History

TENTH EDITION



Julie A. Charlip ■ E. Bradford Burns

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Tenth Edition

Julie A. Charlip

Whitman College

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University of California, Los Angeles

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For our students

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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.