

Latin America

A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY

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P R E F A C E

IN spite of the fact that Latin America is still the most neglected of all the world's major regions, from the point of view of both the British general reader and its treatment in schools, the demand for a text-book on its regional geography has been steadily growing. It is in an effort to supply this need that this volume has been written. The emphasis throughout the book is on regional description, as it is here that the deficiency is greatest. The aim has been to give VIth form and Training College students and those taking up a study of the continent at First Year University level a comprehensive picture of the principal components of the Latin American mosaic. For these students a number of good general treatments are available, and for many of them a basic study of the structural, climatic and vegetational patterns has already formed a part of their geographical work. No attempt has been made, therefore, to do more than provide a brief physical, historical and economic setting for the regional studies which follow.

Because the author feels that the national individuality of the twenty republics is growing rather than declining in importance, the basis of these regional studies is constructed on the framework of each separate national state, although broad linking introductions are provided to the five larger groupings of these republics. One of these great semi-continental areas, that of Middle America, accounts for nearly one-third of the book, a proportion not unjustified when one contemplates its significance in American affairs and the appalling ignorance displayed concerning the lands which compose it. This latter defect is due in no small measure to these middle lands 'falling between two stools', many books dealing with South America only and others with North America, which far too often stops short at the Río Grande. Nor do the syllabuses of most examination boards encourage the student to devote much attention to Middle America. The combined result is that too often it is dismissed inaccurately as 'Central America', or treated as an awkward appendix to the lands lying to the north or south.

Although the author fully subscribes to the fundamental geographical concept that the cores of geographical regions are more

significant than their boundaries, he has risked the division of the national states into major regions by means of firm and definite lines on maps which act as a guide to the reader as each republic is considered. The justification, based partly on nearly thirty years' teaching experience, is that a student has a firmer grasp on a region's content if he is aware of its peripheral limits and can see it as a component of a larger whole. No one is more aware than the author of the defects and generalizations of such boundary drawing; nor does the process follow a uniform criterion. In some cases (as with Brazil) the use of state boundaries is more convenient; in others (as with the Pacific republics) physical criteria of relief, climate or vegetation are employed; while in another group economic considerations of land use may be more fundamental in shaping the regional consciousness of the area's people. In this way the reader is made fully aware of the complexity of the geography of a diverse region which cannot and should not be confined within the strait-jacket of a uniform plan.

The text is not loaded with statistical material, much of which rapidly becomes out-of-date. The emphasis has been a comparative one, to set a state or region in its continental significance. The good teacher and student will always be supplementing regional description with readily available figures to illustrate trends and principles. Some statistics, in summary form, framed so they can be used for comparative purposes, are, however, included for purposes of reference at the end of each chapter.

The author, hopeful that readers of the book will pursue further studies of Latin America, has not hesitated to introduce them to Spanish and Portuguese geographical terminology which often cannot be adequately or accurately translated by one English word. A glossary of these terms is provided, and its use in regional description helps to convey a fuller understanding of areal characteristics, not least in the intelligent interpretation of large and even small-scale maps of the lands being studied.

Many people have co-operated in the publication of the book. These include Mr. D. W. Oliver, who has drawn the maps, Miss O. R. Daniell, who has typed the text, Professor R. W. Steel, whose editorial comments have been invaluable, the staff of Longmans, Green & Co, whose patience has permitted the author to spread the work over several years, and the representatives of many of the

twenty republics who have generously given information. To all these the author is very grateful. Without them the book would not have been possible. Acknowledgment is also made to the companies and institutions which have provided illustrative material, and to the Geographical Association's kindness in permitting the publication of some of the author's maps previously used in their journal *Geography*.

GILBERT J. BUTLAND

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

The Historical Endowment

THE term 'Latin America', embracing all the lands south of the Mexican-United States boundary, and made up of twenty independent republics and a number of European colonies, stresses the Latin characteristics of the peoples and settlements of these lands. These involve language, religion, customs, institutions and economic ideas, all of which can be traced, to a greater or less degree, to European origins in Spain and Portugal, and in a few areas to France and Italy too. This common heritage is a continuing legacy of the last four hundred years, initiated by Columbus's discovery of the New World in 1492. Within fifty years from that event there were few parts of habitable Latin America which had not been visited by Spanish or Portuguese explorers, and although the potential development of some regions had not been foreseen, it is surprising how many of the major settlements had been established in that half century, as the following list will show:

| | | | |
|-------------|------|----------|------|
| Panamá City | 1519 | Asunción | 1537 |
| México City | 1521 | Bogotá | 1538 |
| Quito | 1534 | Sucre | 1538 |
| Lima | 1535 | Santiago | 1541 |

It is inevitable, therefore, that the impress of such a long period should be a strong one, and the common characteristics of even very dissimilar countries are sufficient to give a broad unity to Latin America. This does not mean to say that the much older basis of an indigenous Indian population can be ignored. This is indeed one of the most fundamental contrasts with North America, where the original inhabitants of the continent play a very minor role in the

human geography of the United States and Canada. In Latin America there are large areas occupied almost entirely by Indian peoples, and others where they contribute largely and often predominantly to the ethnic make-up of the inhabitants. The term 'Indo-America', therefore, can have some significance, especially in those parts of the continent where Indian languages, institutions and ways of life still persist.

The evolution of the present political pattern began almost immediately upon the discovery of the continent. The line of Tordesillas, a papal partition of 1494, effectively divided the new lands into a Spanish empire and a large Portuguese colony (Fig. 1). The latter was to grow even larger, by an exchange of the Philippines thirty-five years later, into the largest political unit of Latin America, Brazil. Settlement of this colony, however, remained largely coastal in character, and although large east-west strips were allocated in feudal *capitanias* towards the interior, the plantations and towns of the coastal areas laid the basic population pattern which even still dominates the distribution of Brazilians today. Dutch, French and British attacks on a 4,500-mile coastline had periods of success, and for thirty years in the 17th century the Dutch held the best provinces of Brazil with Pernambuco as their capital. Their activities were finally forced northward into the remote region beyond the Amazon mouths, and the three Guiana colonies (the largest non-Latin fragments of Latin America) are the legacy of their intervention in the continent.

The process of Portuguese colonization was a gradual penetration westward, in which the scattered Indian peoples were incorporated or subdued without a major clash. The Spanish occupation of the rest of the continent was of a very different character, involving four principal conquests of pivotal regions of Indian resistance, and the subsequent spread of military, colonizing and missionary enterprise from those centres to the surrounding areas. The leaders or *conquistadores* of these expeditions, Cortés, Pizarro, Quesada and Valdivia, in thirty years (1520-50) subdued the Aztecs of Mexico, the Incas of Peru, the Chibchas of Colombia and the Araucanians of Mediterranean Chile. Only by this means were colonial administrations established and great areas of territory consolidated into the Spanish domains. The areas of greatest Indian development and culture became the zones of effective Spanish colonization and



Fig. 1. The colonial divisions and administration of Latin America
The present political divisions have evolved from the colonial pattern of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries

exploitation of mineral and agricultural wealth. México City, Lima, Bogotá and Santiago became centres of primary administration, and a network of settlements grew from northern Mexico and the Spanish Main through Panamá and the Spanish ocean to the western outposts of Argentina in the Andean piedmont.

Upon the basis of conquest was established the Spanish colonial system which pervaded the social, economic and political life of Hispanic America. An administrative pattern took shape which in essence shaped the present political distribution of the continent today (Fig. 1). A system of large estates, of a landed minority and landless peasants grew up, which provides not only the *latifundia* problems from Guatemala to Chile but the basic social pattern in much of rural Latin America now. The dominance of the capital city in population and political and economic power began the centralist control and metropolitan concentrations which characterize most of the Latin American states at the present time. The religious, cultural and educational institutions were moulded on those of Spain.

The coming of Independence in the first thirty years of the 19th century at first changed this long-established colonial system but little. Allegiance to Spain was broken, but the pattern of social and economic life remained relatively unaltered. Slowly in many parts autocratic rule has given way to greater democracy; gradually a middle class has evolved; and in this century, the old pattern of primary agricultural and mineral production has been invaded by a growing industrialization. In the process, and as a result of varying factors of location, ethnic composition and physical endowment, the Latin American nations have tended to develop their own individual characteristics, so that in spite of their fundamental historical unity increasingly divergent forces separate them into twenty nations.

One of the major distributions essential to an understanding of the political and economic development of these nations is that of their racial composition. In Latin America as a whole six classifications of principal ethnic ingredients together form the population, but in many states one or two only of these are significant. In Brazil alone do all six contribute sizeable numbers to its total 60 million people. The elements in order of their appearance on the Latin American scene are:

1. THE INDIANS

Differing greatly in the degree of their cultural development and ranging from stone age hunters to the advanced Maya people of southern Mexico and Guatemala, the Indians form the basic element over large areas of interior Brazil, the Andes and Middle America. Today they probably number some 25 millions, fairly equally divided between South and Middle America.

2. THE IBERIANS

The three centuries of Spanish and Portuguese colonial occupation and the continuing attraction of republics with a common language and cultural tradition have made the people from the Iberian peninsula the most numerous European element in the continent. While estimates are little more than intelligent guess-work, it is probable that the pure descendants of Portuguese and Spaniards do not exceed the total of the Indians, a third of their number being in Argentina and Uruguay.

3. THE NEGROES

Finding in many areas the Indian labour supply insufficient for the plantation system they were establishing, the Iberians imported large numbers of African slaves. In north-east Brazil, the West Indies and the Caribbean coastlands the descendants of these immigrants form a substantial proportion of the population, and in all Latin America they number probably 20 millions.

4. THE MIXED ELEMENTS

It is, however, the blending of these three principal types, Indian, Iberian and Negro, that accounts for the majority of Latin Americans today. The *mestizo* or Iberian-Indian mixture is the largest single element in the continent's population, numbering some 60 millions or one-third of the total. The mixtures obviously vary considerably from those predominantly Indian to those largely Iberian, the average Paraguayan or Mexican *mestizo*, for example, being more Indian than the Chilean or Uruguayan type. The Iberian-Negro mixture, or *mulatto*, is less numerous and is chiefly represented in Brazil and the West Indies, a product of the plantation system in those areas. An estimate of 12 millions is an approximation, but the

varying degrees of mixture ranging from almost complete Iberian to 99 per cent Negroid make such estimates open to a big margin of error. The Indian-Negro mixtures known as *zambos* or *cafusos* represent but a relatively small proportion of the Latin Americans, for the fact that negroes were imported into areas lacking an adequate supply of Indian labour indicates that rarely did these two groups exist in large numbers together. Where the Negroes have moved westward in Brazil and in other frontier areas *zambos* occur more abundantly.

5. THE NEW EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

Since Independence, and especially in the last hundred years, considerable numbers of other European immigrants have peopled the continent, in addition to the steady flow of Iberians, which has been a persistent and permanent characteristic throughout four and a half centuries. Italians have been the largest single national group, but Germans, Poles, Swiss, French, British and many from south and eastern Europe have all contributed to the movement. While relatively small numbers of these are found in every Latin American state, the main concentrations are in southern Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and south middle Chile, lands which have been largely settled and opened up by this new tide of immigrants. Because these areas were for the most part empty and neglected by the early Iberian colonists, and because their sparse Indian populations have been greatly reduced or eliminated, the new immigrants form the great mass of the population and there is relatively little racial mixture with the other ethnic elements. They number another 25 millions.

6. THE NEW ASIATIC ELEMENTS

Even more recently, and particularly in the 20th century, Brazil especially has received an influx of Japanese colonists who have settled mainly in the state of São Paulo. With the abolition of slavery in the British and Dutch Empires, Indians from India, Chinese and Javanese were imported to form a labour supply for the plantations of Trinidad and British and Dutch Guiana. Chinese and Japanese occur in most of the principal ports, and a widely-representative gathering of Middle-Eastern Asiatic groups, Syrians and

Lebanese especially, form an element in the principal capital cities. These new Asiatic groups probably total over one million people.

The complexity of this ethnic distribution is increased by the widespread scale of the racial mixture which has taken place. As a result there are few racial antagonisms of any significance. The differences which do occur are largely the outcome of social classes, based on economic, educational and cultural distinctions. Latin America is thus singularly fortunate in being relatively free of the racial problems which beset so much of the world.