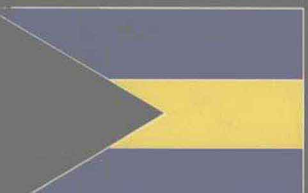
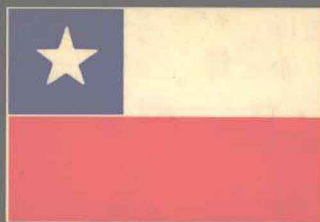


Preston E. James
C. W. Minkel

LATIN AMERICA

Fifth Edition



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Fifth Edition

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LATIN AMERICA

*To the geographers of
Latin America
whom we have known,
and with whom we have worked,
this book is respectfully
dedicated.*

PREFACE

This book is a geography of Latin America. A fundamental objective of geography is the understanding of area, which in this case is translated to mean an understanding of Latin America from a spatial, or geographic, perspective. That objective is a large assignment for author and reader alike. The coauthors of this book have dedicated their professional careers to teaching and conducting research related to Latin America. They have spent much of their lives traveling and working within the region. Yet, Latin America is so vast and complex, and so rapidly changing, that no amount of exposure can provide an adequate degree of expertise. Latin America plays an increasingly important role in world affairs. We must know what that role is, and what to expect from it in the years ahead. This involves a knowledge of places, facts, and concepts. It also requires a dedicated investment of time and effort to achieve some degree of genuine understanding.

Latin America is one of the world's great culture regions and includes that part of the Amer-

icas lying southward, or more specifically southeastward, from the United States. Similarly, the northern part of the hemisphere, including Canada, the United States, and Greenland, is referred to as Anglo-America. Such terms are generalizations, of course, and should not obscure the fact that each of the two major culture regions includes some areas that are neither Latin nor Anglo in historical background or cultural identification.

South America and North America are continents, hence physical regions, divided arbitrarily at the border between Panama and Colombia. Less clearly defined are the terms "Middle America" and "Central America." Middle America as a geographical term probably owes its origin as much to pedagogical convenience as to any reality, but is most commonly considered to be that part of North America lying between the United States and mainland South America, including Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the West Indies. Central America may be considered to include all of the isthmian countries

between Mexico and Colombia. However, due largely to historical reasons, Belize and Panama are often excluded.

Within Latin America there are nearly 40 independent countries and numerous dependent territories. Most of the latter are islands, and they constitute only a tiny fragment of what were formerly vast overseas empires. Probably the most outstanding characteristic of the entire area is its diversity—physical, cultural, economic, and political. Even within the individual countries conditions are so diverse that it has been difficult, in many cases, to achieve national unity and sustained progress. In recent decades, nevertheless, substantial progress has been made, at least in material welfare for most segments of the populace. This, in turn, has led to rising expectations, especially since the advent of modern electronic systems of communication. Growing demands for a share of “the good things in life” for all segments of society have placed increased strain on fragile political, economic, and social structures in the developing countries throughout the world. In Latin America, as elsewhere, this condition is reflected in political instability. Unfortunately, it is the acts of terrorism, the *coups d'état*, and the revolutions which capture the attention of the news media in Anglo-America and Western Europe.

• • •

It must now be recognized, in the United States, that successful dealings with Latin America can be effected only on the basis of mutual respect and understanding. Countries of the region are no longer willing to be treated as political and economic dependents of Western Europe or the United States. External aid for development will be accepted from the technologically advanced nations and from transnational corporations, but only on terms that properly recognize local sovereignty and domestic interests.

A heady nationalism will prevail for some years to come, reflecting the newfound sense of self-determination. This already has been illus-

trated in actions such as the expropriation of foreign investments, membership in international cartels to control raw material prices, territorial disputes, and the expansion of national sovereignty to include extensive areas of adjacent seas. There is a growing sensitivity to any foreign pressure, especially if it touches on conditions considered to be of purely domestic concern. Yet, while feelings of nationalism may be strong, it has been shown that no people can in isolation carve out their own destiny in the modern world. All are interdependent, and so will remain.

Despite substantial economic growth in recent decades within the region as a whole, many problems and opportunities remain. These form the major themes of the present edition. The problems, in most cases, are not new. Rather, their origins can be traced to conditions that have prevailed for extended periods of time. Their solutions are therefore not likely to be found within any given decade. Development, or modernization, must be recognized as a continuing endeavor—one that has no specific point of termination. Moreover, while both foreign and domestic writers have tended to dwell on the problems of Latin America, it would be unwise to shroud oneself with pessimism when studying the region and contemplating its future. The population of Latin America is young, resourceful, and energetic; natural resources remain to be developed, and there are frontiers yet to be conquered. The region, and each country thereof, is worth knowing and understanding.

In writing this volume on Latin America, the authors have received valuable assistance from many sources. The maps, more than 100 in total, were prepared by the Center for Cartographic Research and Spatial Analysis of Michigan State University, under the direction of Richard M. Smith and Michael Lipsey. Statistical reports were gathered and forwarded from many countries by the local project directors of the Inter-American Geodetic Survey, whose collaboration in any worthy cause is an institutional tradition. The photographs were supplied largely by the Inter-American Development Bank and by the

World Bank, as a generous contribution. The manuscript was typed at the University of Tennessee by Jean Lester and Frances Houser, and Hugo Bodini contributed substantially to the development of the Bibliography. Throughout all aspects of the writing and publication, the contribution of Eileen W. James has been well

beyond measure. To these and the many others who have assisted in this endeavor, the authors express their sincere gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION



PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS



No one can have followed the news from the Americas in recent years without a realization that Latin America is an area of worldwide concern. The Revolution in Cuba in 1958, and that country's subsequent support of international communism, caused major political upheaval throughout the hemisphere. The discovery of vast reserves of petroleum in Mexico, along the Gulf Coast, has altered that nation's economic prospects and its potential role in world affairs. Central America has become a battleground with international overtones, and in the Lesser Antilles many small islands have become independent nations, with full participation in the United Nations and other international organizations. Brazil has demonstrated the potential to become one of the world's major powers of the twenty-first century, and Argentina has challenged the United Kingdom, by open warfare, over control of the Falkland or Malvinas Islands. To citizens of the United States, whose attention is usually focused on domestic concerns or events in Europe, a flood of illegal aliens from lands to the south has created conditions that can no longer be ignored.

Few parts of the earth have experienced change more rapidly in recent decades than has Latin America. This change has been mostly stimulated by striking improvements in the technical aspects of transportation and communication since World War II. As a result, millions of people in Latin America are joining in a demand for better living conditions and for an end to the inequities that have traditionally characterized their society.

Both the people and the natural resources of Latin America have long been exploited. Some lands were worked and abandoned by Indians long before the arrival of Columbus. In the centuries that followed Columbus, the so-called New World was ransacked by Spaniards, Portuguese, French, British, Dutch, and other people of European origin. Latin America is not, then, a virgin land. It is an old land in which many of its sources of accumulated treasure have been depleted and deserted, and in which many of its landscapes have been profoundly altered by human action.

What, then, are the principal characteristics of Latin America about which Americans of all nationalities should be aware? There is, of course, an almost infinite number of answers that could be given. Yet, certain general similarities seem to prevail, each with its own subset of features and factors. Six characteristics especially worthy of consideration are: (1) physical diversity of the land, (2) cultural diversity of the people, (3) inequalities in the human condition, (4) rapid population growth, (5) nationalism, and (6) emphasis on development.

Organization of American States

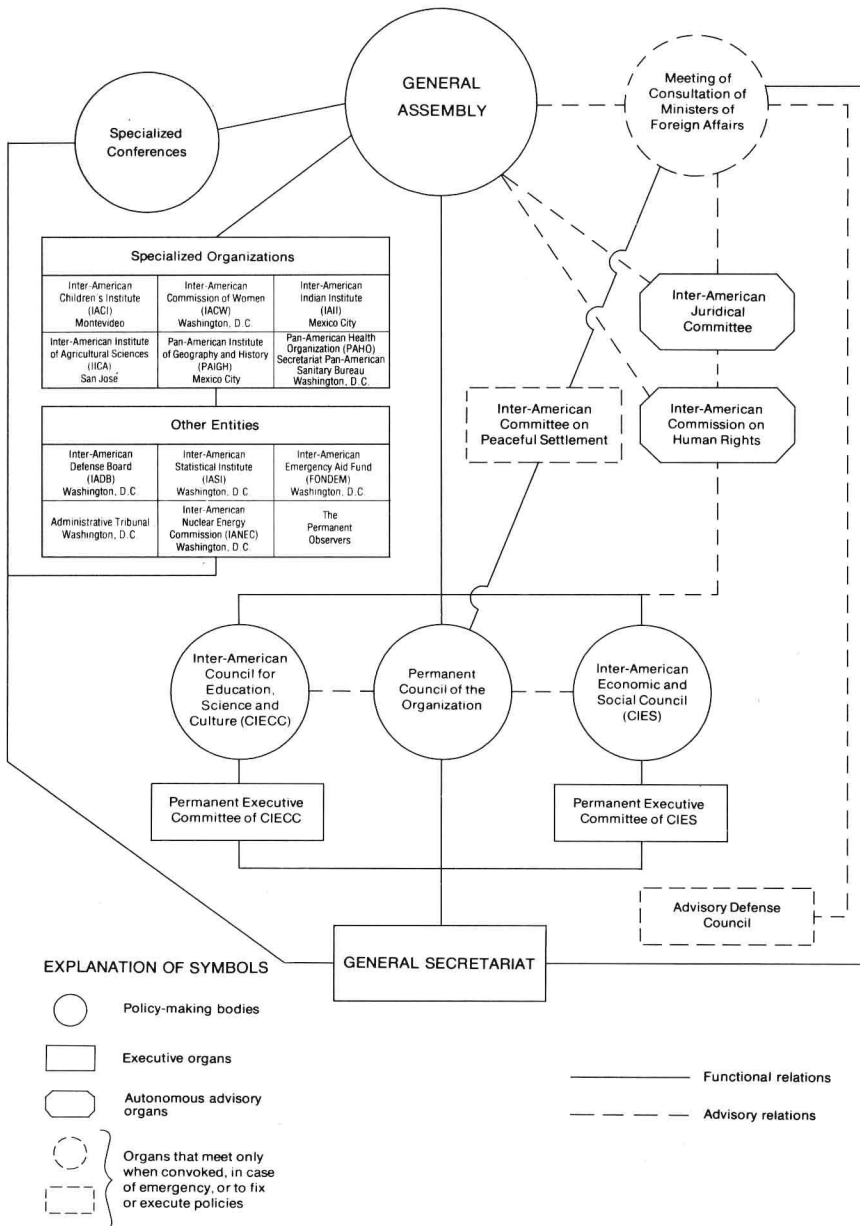


FIGURE 1-1

Diversity of the Land

Physical diversity is characteristic of almost any major world region and is one of those features that make the earth such an interesting planet on which to live. Yet, that diversity is particularly evident in Latin America and must be understood to appreciate the variety of circumstances in which human societies within the region have evolved through time.

In Latin America tectonic forces are responsible for such features as deep oceanic trenches off the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Chile; volcanism in central Mexico, Central America, the Lesser Antilles, and the High Andes; and extensive folding of the rock structure under, and emerging from, the Caribbean Sea. Earthquakes of devastating force have almost completely leveled major cities such as Antigua, Guatemala; Managua, Nicaragua; Port Royal, Jamaica; and Popayán, Colombia. Least affected are ancient crystalline rock areas, such as the Brazilian Highlands, which comprise the core of the South American continent.

Surface Features

The geologic structures and surface forms of western Canada and the United States continue southward into Mexico. Conspicuous features are the elongated ^{peninsula} of Baja California and the Mexican Plateau, separated by a rift valley occupied by the Gulf of California and adjacent lowlands. The Plateau rises in elevation as it extends southward from the U.S. border to about latitude 20°N. There, it is abruptly terminated by a northwest-southeast chain of towering volcanoes. Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and much of Nicaragua, belong to a structural region that extends under the Caribbean eastward to Jamaica, southeastern Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands—an area of folded and faulted rocks with a generally east-west trend. Between this “Central American-Antillean” region and connected to South America lie two chains of volcanic moun-

tains: the Lesser Antilles and the highlands of El Salvador, southwestern Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and western Colombia.

There is as well a pronounced eastward orientation in the entire southern portion of the North American continent. Thus, anyone traveling straight southward from any point in the United States west of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, would miss the South American continent entirely. This eastward thrust in Middle America and eastward location of South America help, of course, to account for the significance of Miami, Florida, as a center for travel and trade with Latin America.

Three main surface divisions form the major lineaments of the continent of South America. On the west are the relatively young Andes Mountains, paralleling the Pacific Coast and flanking the Caribbean. On the east are the Guiana and Brazilian highlands, which are geologically much older than the Andes. In the central portion of the continent lie the plains of the Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Paraguay-Paraná-Plata.

The massive ramparts of the Andes stand unbroken from Trinidad to Tierra del Fuego. They are barely 200 miles wide, except in Bolivia where the width is doubled. Many peaks exceed 18,000 feet in altitude, and Mount Aconcagua (22,834 feet) is the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere. The Andes are formed mostly of folded and faulted structures, but in three distinct areas there are groups of active volcanoes. These are in southern Colombia and Ecuador, in middle and southern Peru and along the border of Bolivia and Chile, and in the southern part of middle Chile.

South America east of the Andes is composed mostly of highlands, which extend with few interruptions from southern Colombia and Venezuela across Brazil to the northern bank of the Río de la Plata and reappear in Patagonia. Throughout this vast territory three main surface elements predominate. There is a base of ancient crystalline rocks that forms a hilly upland; above this in a few places are the stumps of old, worn-down mountains; and covering the crystalline