



## A NOTE ON LATIN AMERICA

by James G. Maddox

The purpose of this background statement is to bring together, for easy reference, some of the commonly-known characteristics of Latin America. It is meant both for those who are just beginning their study of Latin America, and for those who may want to refresh their memory quickly about some of the main characteristics of the region.

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The term "Latin America," as used here, refers to the twenty republics of the Western Hemisphere which are located south and southeast of the United States. We, therefore, exclude from consideration those non self-governing territories and dependencies of France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, that are located in this general region of the world. There is nothing particularly sacrosanct about this terminology. It appears, however, to be in accord with United Nations usage. The twenty countries to which we refer by the term "Latin America" are:

- |                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Argentina          | 11. Guatemala |
| 2. Bolivia            | 12. Haiti     |
| 3. Brazil             | 13. Honduras  |
| 4. Chile              | 14. Mexico    |
| 5. Colombia           | 15. Nicaragua |
| 6. Costa Rica         | 16. Panama    |
| 7. Cuba               | 17. Paraguay  |
| 8. Dominican Republic | 18. Peru      |
| 9. Ecuador            | 19. Uruguay   |
| 10. El Salvador       | 20. Venezuela |

Exactly half of these countries -- Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama -- are parts of North America. The remaining ten constitute most of the continent of South America.

### AREA AND POPULATION

The twenty Latin American republics embrace a total land area which is more than two and one-half times as large as the

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United States (Table 1). Their total population in 1952 was 161,628,000, compared to approximately 157,000,000 in the United States. Brazil, with over 54,000,000, is the largest of the Latin American countries, both in terms of land area and of population. Mexico, with almost 27,000,000, ranks second in terms of population but is third in land area. Argentina ranks third in population and second in land area. These three countries--Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico--have approximately 99,500,000 people within their borders, which is about 62 per cent of the total population of Latin America. If we add the three next most populous countries, namely, Colombia, Peru, and Chile--which as a group have a population of about 26,500,000--we find that the six countries with the largest number of people account for 78 per cent of the total population of the region. Finally, it may be of some interest to point out that the ten countries which are a part of the North American continent have a combined population of almost 47,000,000, which is approximately 29 per cent of the total, whereas their combined land area represents only 13 per cent of the total (Table 1).

It is quite evident, from the data in Table 1, that the countries of really heavy population density are Haiti, El Salvador, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Population pressure in Haiti is certainly extreme. Moreover, in some cases the population density figures point up the fact that countries with essentially the same climate, soil, and agricultural potentialities have not utilized their resources in the same way or to the same degree. For instance, Haiti and Dominican Republic share the same island, with the drier and more rugged part being in the former country, but the population density is two-and-one-half times as great in Haiti as in Dominican Republic. Likewise, El Salvador has almost four times as many people per square kilometer as adjoining Honduras (Table 1).

It must never be overlooked, however, that the country-by-country density figures often obscure the most important aspect of the man-land ratio in much of Latin America. This aspect is the heavy concentration of population in the areas of high altitude. Because most of Latin America lies within the range of 30 degrees north and 30 degrees south of the equator, many lowland areas are either hot and humid, or unhealthy jungle or dry barren desert. As a result, a large proportion of the population of most of the countries is crowded into areas of relatively high altitude, where the climate is often quite similar to that of more temperate regions. For instance, 90-95 per cent of the people of Bolivia live on the high altiplano in the western part of the country, at elevations of 11,000 to 15,000 feet, or in the mountain valleys that descend eastward from the altiplano. Probably not more than 5 per cent of the people live in the eastern and northern provinces, which include about three-fourths of the land area of Bolivia. Thus, the country which has the lowest man-land ratio, as indicated by the data in Table 1, actually has a serious problem of overcrowding in the highlands. There are many other examples of this same general phenomenon. It has been estimated, for instance, that 60 per cent of the entire population of Peru

## PERU



THIS PERUVIAN LOWLAND jungle is typical of much of the area of Latin America. Lush, but disease-ridden, the jungle areas are as yet generally unproductive and contribute little to the wealth of Latin America.



THE HIGHLAND INDIANS OF PERU practice a variety of crafts. The weaver at the left wears some of the products of her loom.



THE HIGHLANDS OF LATIN AMERICA are intensively cultivated in most countries and support dense populations. As in the Peruvian area pictured at the left, terracing is commonly practiced.

live in the Andes at altitudes higher than 10,000 feet. About an equal percentage of the population of Ecuador live in a narrow tableland, 5,000-9,000 feet above sea level and 20-30 miles wide, which runs north and south through the country.

The general picture of densely populated highlands and almost unsettled lowlands is common to many Latin American countries, but it is most evident in those that have a heavy Indian population, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The relatively sparse population in many lowland areas may hold potentialities for the future which will be of real significance. If advances in medical science, in the technology of highway construction, and in agricultural practices adapted to the tropics are of such a nature as to make feasible the opening-up of the vast jungle areas for future settlement, the Western Hemisphere will have a great new frontier which will provide living room for many millions of people. Within recent years there have been several "new approaches" to conquering the jungle.

The need for new areas of settlement in Latin America is highlighted not only by the overcrowding which now exists in many parts of the highlands but also by the rapidly increasing population. Apparently, there is no other large region of the world in which the rate of population increase is so rapid as in Latin America. In recent years, it has been more than two per cent per year. Moreover, there is a large proportion of young people in the population, and most of the region is at that stage of development at which death rates are declining while birth rates remain high. Both factors suggest that the rate of population increase will continue to be rapid for several decades. Although the accuracy of population and vitality statistics leaves much to be desired in most of the countries, some suggestion of the relatively rapid rise in population numbers comes from the 1952 data, available for a few countries, showing the crude birth and death rates per 1,000 inhabitants. They are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Birth Rate</u>	<u>Death Rate</u>
Argentina	24.9	8.8
Chile	33.6	13.8
Colombia	37.1	13.1
Costa Rica	54.8	11.6
Dominican Republic	42.2	10.5
El Salvador	48.7	16.3
Honduras	40.1	12.7
Mexico	43.9	14.9
Panama	33.1	8.1
Peru	25.9	10.1
Venezuela	43.7	10.8

<sup>1</sup> From Statistical Yearbook 1953, United Nations.

Table 1 -- Estimated population, area, and density of population for Latin American countries, compared with the United States<sup>1</sup>

Country	Population in 1952 (000's omitted)	Area in Square Kilometers	Population per Sq.Km.
Argentina	18,056	2,808,492	6
Bolivia	3,089	1,098,581	3
Brazil	54,477	8,516,037	6
Chile	5,932	741,767	8
Colombia	11,768	1,138,355	10
Costa Rica	850	51,011	17
Cuba	5,469*	114,524	48*
Dominican Republic	2,236	48,734	46
Ecuador	3,350	275,000	12
El Salvador	1,986	34,126	58
Guatemala	2,890*	108,889	27*
Haiti	3,200	27,750	115
Honduras	1,513	112,088	13
Mexico	26,922	1,969,367	14
Nicaragua	1,088	148,000	7*
Panama	841	75,475	11
Paraguay	1,464	406,752	4
Peru	8,864	1,311,030	7
Uruguay	2,353**	186,926	13**
Venezuela	5,280	912,050	6
TOTAL	180,783	20,084,954	
United States	156,981	7,827,680	20

<sup>1</sup> From Statistical Yearbook 1953, United Nations.

\* For 1951.

\*\* For 1949.

The significance of these figures may be enhanced by comparing them with similar data, from the same source, for a few other countries of the world. The following seven countries have been selected (the figures are for 1952, except in the case of Japan where 1951 data were the latest available):

<u>Country</u>	<u>Birth Rate</u>	<u>Death Rate</u>
United States	24.5	9.6
Canada	27.4	8.6
France	19.2	12.3
United Kingdom	15.7	11.4
Australia	23.3	9.4
Philippines	14.6	6.0
Japan	25.4	10.0

Although it is easy to read too much into comparative data of this type, it is evident that Latin America's population is expanding much more rapidly than is the case in most of the highly developed regions of the world. Much of the region's future may depend, in fact, on the speed of population increase as related to the advance in technology. Urbanization is proceeding at quite a rapid pace in most of the Latin American countries, but there is not clear evidence as yet that it is slowing down the birth rate to the extent that one can clearly foresee a stabilization of population numbers within the next two or three decades.

#### CULTURAL INHERITANCE

Latin America has many of the cultural characteristics of Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. Nevertheless, it is a unique part of Western culture with many characteristics quite different from those found in other areas of the Western world. Most of these differences stem from a mixture of historical factors associated with the racial and cultural backgrounds of the present population. Some of the most important of these are described briefly in the following paragraphs.

One factor of importance is the racial backgrounds of the people. There have been three important streams of racial influence in Latin America. They are: (1) the original Indian populations; (2) African Negroes originally imported as slaves; and (3) the early European settlers from Spain and Portugal. These are the three groups that have most influenced the present-day culture of Latin America. The Spanish and Portuguese settlers, in contrast to the North Europeans who settled the United States and Canada, intermixed with the native Indians and later with the Negroes. Of the twenty Latin American countries, only Argentina, Uruguay, and Costa Rica are primarily of white stock. Haiti is largely Negroid. In most of the other countries, the mixture of white and Indian, usually called Mestizo, constitutes the great majority of the population. In Brazil, however, the white and Negro mixture is strong. This is also the case in Cuba,

and in the coastal areas of most of the countries bordering the Caribbean Sea. At the time of the Spanish conquest, there were highly developed Indian cultures in what is now Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. These are the countries where the Indian influences are strongest today.

Of perhaps more importance, however, than the blending of the races have been the inherited social institutions and customs. In respect to these, the original Spanish conquerors had a much greater influence than either the indigenous Indians or the imported Africans. There were three social institutions of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain which were imported into Latin America that have had tremendous influence in shaping its present-day culture. They were: (1) the plantation system of large-scale farming, in which the land was worked by peasant sharecroppers and later by slaves, and in which the landlord had the right both to make local laws and to dispense justice under them; (2) a strong military class with important economic and military power in the society; and (3) the Catholic religion, with the Church having close ties to the State. These three institutions, all of which tend toward the centralization of power in the hands of an elite class, were quite compatible with the social and political organization of the most highly developed of the Indian societies which existed at the time of the conquest. They were, therefore, imposed on the Indians largely by substituting Spanish leadership for Indian leadership. Moreover, they were buttressed and protected by a colonial policy which virtually excluded immigrants from any area of Europe except Spain and Portugal, and their feudalistic tendencies were further enhanced by a highly centralized system of colonial administration.

These three institutions have, of course, undergone significant changes within the past three centuries, and have lost much of their original power, particularly in Mexico and Uruguay. Nevertheless, the large landowner, the Catholic church, and the army are still the most powerful influences in most of the Latin American countries. They do not operate together in perfect harmony; nor are they equally-balanced opposing forces. But regardless of the intricate and subtle ways in which their interests and power are related, they have great influence and have built other important customs and institutions that have enhanced their strength. One of these supplementing social institutions has been an educational system which has placed heavy emphasis on law, logic, and rhetoric relative to science and empirical investigations. Another is highly centralized government. Only Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela have federal systems of government, and the powers of the states are quite limited in at least three of these even when their constitutions are being fully respected by the particular persons in power.

As an aid to understanding the relevance and strength of Latin America's cultural inheritance, and the ways in which its society contrasts with that of the United States, it is not amiss to point out that Spain and Portugal were two European countries



that largely escaped the direct impact of such important social movements as the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of laissez-faire Capitalism. Two streams of thought that have been extremely important in shaping the culture of Western Europe and the United States have never had a position of great importance in Latin America. They are: the growth of scientific methods of investigation and the application of science to problems of industry, transportation, and agriculture; and the moral concept of equality of rights among men. The two are related, and they have not had a fertile environment in which to develop in Latin America. Feudalistic elements have impeded their influence.

Nevertheless, it would be completely wrong to say that the influence of the United States and Canada has been negligible, or that no parts of Western Europe, except Spain and Portugal, have contributed to the cultural inheritance of Latin America. Since the fight for independence from Spain, which culminated about 1825, many stimuli to progress have come from these regions. The Wars of Independence received a large part of their intellectual orientation from the writings of the French radicals and from Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. In short, they had the same intellectual godfathers as did our Revolutionary War. Their success, however, was probably due more to Napoleon's successful ventures in Spain and to a desire of the upper class in Latin America to free its overseas trade from the restrictive policies of the mother country than it was to a people's movement to increase individual liberty and to install democratic forms of government.

Nevertheless, the winning of independence had the important effect of opening up trade, immigration, and intellectual intercourse between Latin America and the rest of the Western world. In the fields of commerce and industry, the influence of the United States and Western Europe has been strong for almost a century. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 increased the effectiveness of this influence by making the west coast of Latin America easily available to ships from the United States and Europe. The more recent developments in airplane transportation have brought most of the major cities of Latin America within a day's travel time of the great metropolitan centers of this country and of Europe. It is not, however, only in the fields of business that United States influence has been important. For almost a century U.S. religious agencies have been sending missionaries to Latin America, and within recent years there have been 4,000 to 5,000 representatives of these agencies stationed in the 20 Latin American countries. They operate hundreds of schools, scores of hospitals and clinics, and numerous farms and social service centers. Many of their institutions have had long and successful years of service. At the diplomatic level, United States influence in Latin America has been particularly constructive since the inauguration of various technical-assistance programs under the auspices of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (founded in 1940). These programs have been carried forward in more recent years by the

State Department, the Technical Cooperation Administration, and the Foreign Operations Administration.

Out of its diverse cultural inheritance -- stemming in part from ancient Indian civilizations, in part from backward feudalistic Spain, and in part from impacts from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe -- Latin America has developed a society which has its own characteristics although it is within the orbit of Western culture. Many of the liberal movements in Latin America represent attempts to throw off some of the features of this past inheritance. It is not uncommon to find progressive thinking centering around such ideas as: (1) land reform, which is a manifestation of antilandlordism; (2) church reform, which is usually an anticlerical movement; (3) government reform, which is usually in opposition to military dictatorships; and (4) nationalism, commonly expressed as opposition to foreign business. In a real sense Latin American liberals are trying to rid their countries of some of their worst inheritances. Much of this liberal thinking suffers from a difficulty in articulating its real purposes, and the strong nationalistic flavor which permeates much of it appears to many North Americans to be somewhat antithetical to its other elements. Nevertheless, these elements are the features around which new social and political movements are likely to continue to develop.

#### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Latin America is a rapidly growing, expanding region of the world. Population is increasing; the rate of investment is high; large numbers of people are moving to cities; means of transportation are improving; in several areas manufacturing is expanding; and technology is improving slowly in most places but rapidly in some. These and related forces are breaking down old social forms and institutions. Moreover, there is great variation among the twenty Latin American countries with respect both to the rate and the level of economic development. For these reasons it is difficult to generalize with accuracy about present economic and social conditions. A brief statement runs the grave risk of misleading the uninformed and of irritating the knowledgeable. Nevertheless, there are a few points that can be made with a reasonable degree of accuracy which may be of some value.

One characteristic, for example, which is certainly worth noting is that poverty is more widespread and chronic than in any other large region of Western culture. This is one of those complex social phenomena which are never adequately measured, much less explained, by statistical indices. Moreover, the data are meager and none too reliable.

Nevertheless, all indices record that infant mortality rates are high; housing is of poor quality and overcrowding is common; life expectancy at birth is 15-20 years less in most Latin American countries than in the United States; the number of doctors and dentists per 1,000 people is low; large proportions of

people never get enough good food to eat to nourish their bodies properly; ill health is common; illiteracy is high. These are deep-seated characteristics of Latin America. Most of the people are extremely poor, and their parents and grandparents before them were poor. Moreover, most of them expect their children to be poor, and in area after area their expectations will surely be realized. Progress in raising levels of living is being made, but the distance yet to be traveled is great.

Back of this grinding poverty is an economic system which is a low producer of the goods and services that are needed. In many of the countries there is a serious maldistribution of the total output. A small upper class obtains a large proportion of what is produced. Some few people in this group are extremely rich. But the real problem is one of low productivity. This, in turn, stems from a multitude of factors, only a few of which can be mentioned in this brief statement. There is a shortage of capital; a heavy reliance on antiquated technology, especially in agriculture; a working population which is unable to perform long, sustained hours of productive labor because of its poverty, ill health, undernourishment, and lack of training. Finally, Latin America is no El Dorado of natural resources. For instance, it is a region which is desperately short of the basic fuel resources needed to erect an industrial economy. Its areas of really good land are probably less in relation to its total land area than in either Europe or the United States. Its forests are low in the proportion of softwoods, and the great mixture of species which characterize tropical forests makes the economic utilization of its timber resources difficult and expensive. Finally, many of its good land areas, and much of its timber, are located at great distances from markets and centers of population.

Closely related to the poverty of the region, and the low productivity of its economic system, is the social stratification of society and the difficulty which the common man has in climbing the rungs of the economic ladder.

Upper-class status has been traditionally reflected by large landholdings. Landed estates have had a prestige value, in many of the countries, out of all proportion to their earning capacity. The tendency to make large landholdings the hallmark of upper-class status has largely been eliminated in Mexico, as a result of its land reform program and other aftermaths of the Mexican Revolution. It is being seriously, and perhaps successfully, challenged in Bolivia. It has been diluted in the industrial area around Sao Paulo, Brazil. In most Latin American countries, however, it is still very important. With large landholdings go not only social prestige but also political power, a close working relationship with army officers, and the support of the Catholic church. In many of the smaller countries as few as two or three dozen upper-class families may virtually dominate public policy.

At the other end of the social scale -- in lower-class status -- is found the great majority of the population. Most of

the people are laborers or small sharecropping tenants on large farms, with practically no education and little prospect of becoming independent owners. An increasing number, but still a small proportion of the total, are industrial and service workers around the cities. In countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, the Indian usually ranks at the very bottom of the social scale. It is in the great lower-class population that one finds the tremendous wastage of human resources in the form of a short life span, ill health, malnutrition, illiteracy, and lack of incentive. The door of opportunity, though perhaps never completely closed, is so narrowly open to people of lower-class rank that they have little hope for significant improvement. In rural areas particularly, they continue their plodding tasks from generation to generation in an incessant struggle to get their hands on enough food and clothing to keep body and soul together.

The middle class in most countries is small. It is made up mainly of tradesmen, teachers, and white-collar workers in the cities. There is little place for a middle class in rural areas. Because of rapid urbanization and the growth of industry in some countries, the middle class is expanding in size. Its growth may be very important in the course of future affairs. If, for instance, positions of social and political prestige continue to be reserved almost exclusively for the landowning upper class, so that the middle and lower classes are thrown together ideologically, political battlelines may be drawn more and more in terms of property values versus human values.

The existence of widespread poverty coupled with a social organization in which relatively few families possess great wealth, prestige, and power are important obstacles to individual freedom in Latin American society. The ordinary citizen is quite often in the position of seeking favors and assistance from someone with power and prestige. It is all too rare that he is able to stand on his own feet, exercise his own judgment, and determine, at least in small part, his own destiny. It is not uncommon for the laborers on the large farms to be almost wholly dependent on the owner, or his representative, for housing, credit, police protection, educational and health facilities, guidance in solving family problems, and direction as to how to vote, if the exercise of the ballot is available. The centralization of government -- which in many Latin American countries places the responsibility for such activities as conducting primary schools, the construction and repair of neighborhood roads, providing ordinary police protection, and the selection of municipal officials in the hands of cabinet officials in capital cities -- has the effect of depriving local citizens of many opportunities to exercise their political knowledge and to gain experience in governing themselves.

Latin America, notwithstanding the many difficulties it has to overcome, is making progress toward increasing the productivity of its economy and raising the level of living of its people. Many of its characteristics, and some of its future problems, are

suggested by the data in Table 2, which have been taken from the Economic Survey of Latin America, 1951-52, by the Economic Commission for Latin America of the United Nations. The gross product, as shown in Table 2, is the estimated value of the total output of the goods and services produced within Latin America in 1950. The estimates were based on data for the ten countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, which produced about 90 per cent of the gross product for the region.

Table 2 -- The gross product, labor force, and product per worker, by activities, in Latin America in 1950

	Gross Product		Labor Force		Product per worker in dollars at 1950 prices
	Millions of dollars at 1950 prices	As per cent of all activities	Millions of workers	As per cent of all activities	
Agriculture	9,904	25.8	32.2	57.9	308
Manufacturing and construction	9,921	25.9	9.2	16.6	1,078
Mining	1,603	4.2	0.5	0.9	3,206
Transport and public utility services	2,268	5.9	1.8	3.2	1,260
Commerce, gov't., and other services	<u>14,624</u>	<u>38.2</u>	<u>11.9</u>	<u>21.4</u>	<u>1,229</u>
TOTAL	38,320	100.0	55.6	100.0	689

Although further work in the field of national income analysis may bring about some significant changes in these estimates in future years, they probably represent a degree of accuracy sufficient to point up several conclusions that are worth noting:

- A. If the ten countries listed above account for approximately 90 per cent of the gross product of the region, the remaining ten countries -- Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay -- are of relatively minor importance as producers of the world's goods. They account for a little more than 11 per cent of the region's population, and about 30 per cent of its land area.

- B. It is particularly significant that almost 58 per cent of the Latin American labor force is engaged in agriculture, but it produces only about 26 per cent of the total product. Here is the great reservoir of low-productivity workers.
- C. The great difference between the productivity per worker in agriculture and in other sectors of the economy suggests the desirability of shifting factors of production away from farming and into other activities.
- D. Manufacturing, construction, transportation, commerce, and the service trades are the logical areas for expansion. The productivity per worker in these sectors of the economy is remarkably similar. The fact that these sectors now use over 40 per cent of the working force -- at much higher levels of output than does agriculture -- points toward continued growth. This suggests more urbanization and industrialization. (Mining is limited by natural factors and is a relatively minor employer of labor, even though the output per worker is extremely high.)
- E. Finally, the data strongly suggest that the economy of Latin America has already moved quite a distance away from the heavy reliance on agriculture that has characterized much of its past. The struggle for political and social power between the old landowning families and the rising industrial and commercial population of the cities may be the really important development for the social scientist to keep his eye on in the years ahead.

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