

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

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.

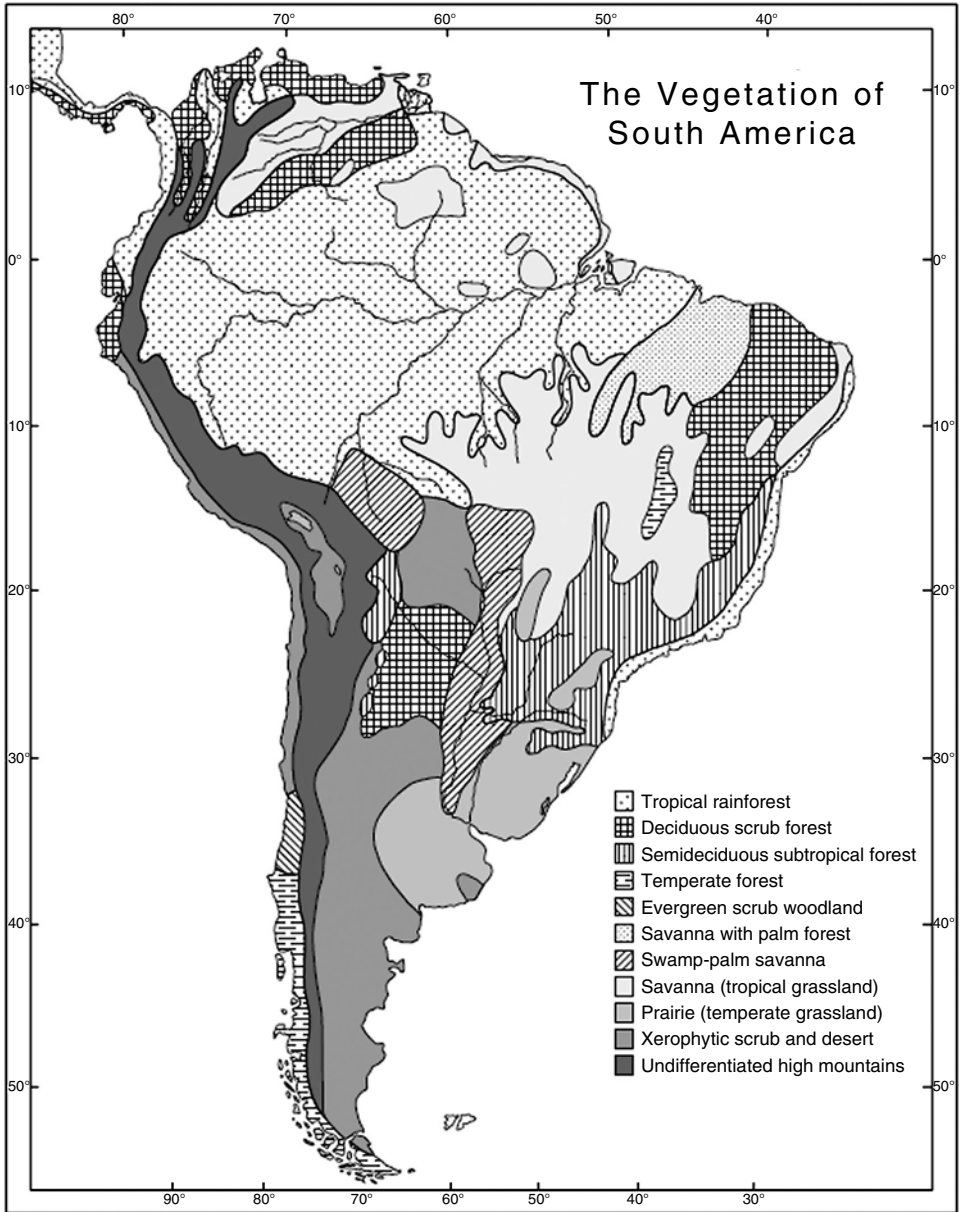
Geography

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,



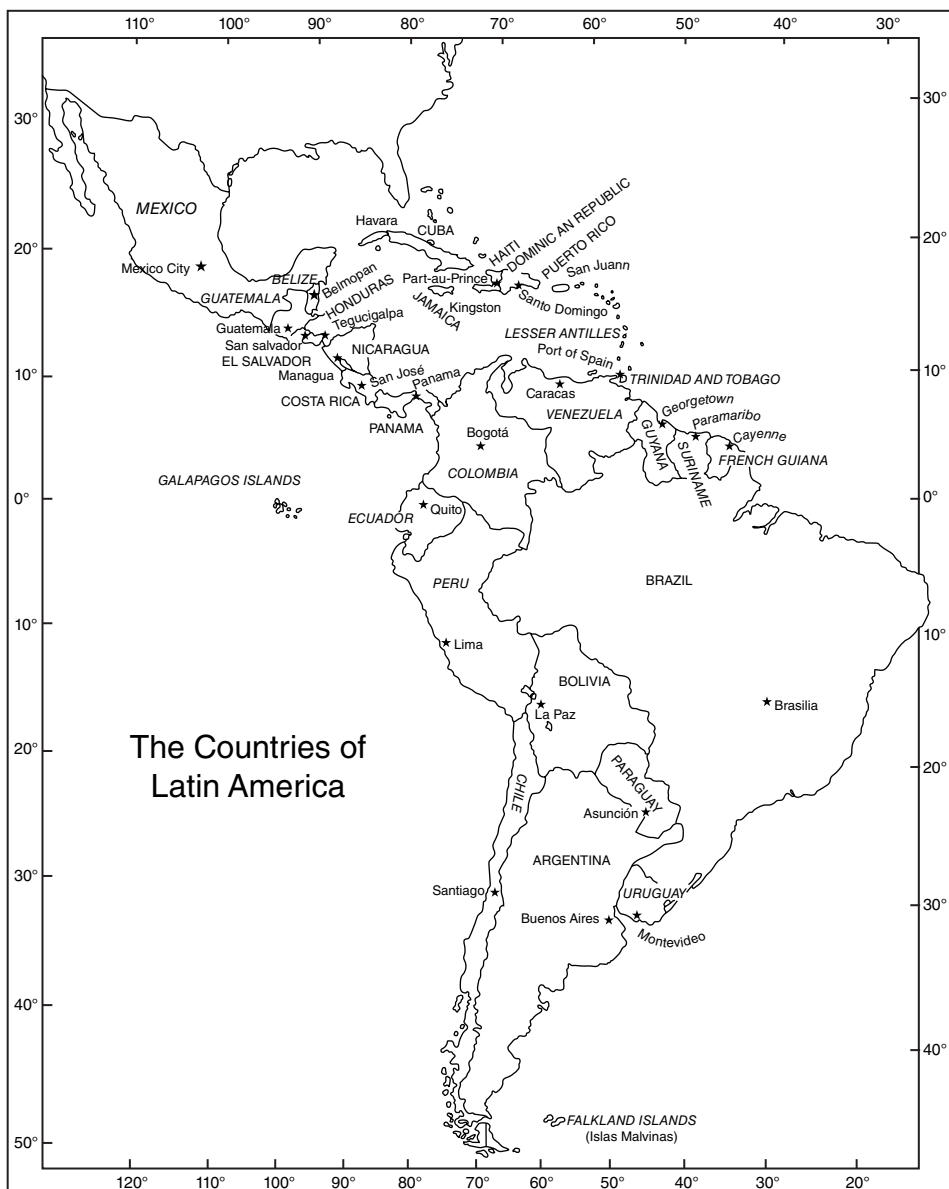
Map 1.1 The vegetation of South America. (Courtesy Cathryn L. Lombardi and John V. Lombardi, *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas*, © 1993 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reprinted by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.)

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

extremely wealthy. The World Bank calculates that much of the population lacks basic services such as water, sanitation, access to health care and vaccinations, education, and protection from crime. Poverty levels declined markedly in the first decades of this century, but roughly a quarter of Latin Americans continued to survive on less than \$2.50 a day. Although Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Paraguay rank as the countries with the greatest inequality, the sheer numbers of poor in Brazil and in Mexico pose some of the greatest challenges to those nations' resources. According to United Nations development reports, lack of access to basic infrastructure serves as a major impediment to anti-poverty initiatives since 30 percent of extremely poor people are concentrated in rural areas far from the reach of public and private resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected Latin America, derailing earlier decades of economic growth in some regions, giving rise to authoritarian populist governmental policies, creating a crisis in education, and exposing gross inequalities in health care, social services, and employment opportunities. Of all continents, Latin America has been the hardest hit by the pandemic, and its effects will be felt for many years to come. The shortage of vaccines, and the hoarding of vaccine technology and distribution in the United States and other wealthy nations, has devastated the poorer countries of the world, especially Latin America. Although the United States and India have the most cases, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia have some of the highest death rates in the world. Latin America has 8.4 percent of the world's population but accounted for nearly 30 percent of deaths from COVID. The effect on education, economic activity, job creation, and the overall health of the population has been, and will continue to be, catastrophic.

Historians argue over the source of Latin America's inequality, some tracing it back to the days of European conquest over large indigenous populations and centuries of exploitation of imported African slaves. Others note that Latin American leaders have failed to promote the type of policies for the efficient exploitation of the continent's vast natural resources that would be required to raise the standard of living of the majority of its people. Another group points to the need to improve Latin America's commercial relations with the rest of the world, or to build ties among themselves, as through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its slightly revised successor, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which links Canada, the United States, and Mexico; the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); MERCOSUR or MERCOSUL (Spanish: *Mercado Común del Sur*; Portuguese: *Mercado Comum do Sul*; English: Southern Common Market), which currently includes Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela; and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN, *Comunidad Andina de Naciones*), encompassing Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. A few nations, especially Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, have pursued bilateral trade agreements with the United States, the European Union, China, and other nations in Asia. Similar initiatives by the Peruvian and Panamanian governments to enter into trade pacts with the United States have met with stiff opposition from their local labor unions and farmers.

The debates these agreements have generated do not focus on trade per se, but on the long-term impact of entering into compacts with larger, more developed, and technologically more advanced nations. Critics charge that Mexico has benefited little from

NAFTA. In fact, NAFTA has resulted in a flood of agricultural commodities into the Mexican market from the United States and Canada, where they are produced far more efficiently and cheaply. As a result, Mexican farmers have been driven off the land and into crowded urban centers, or across the border to the United States, in order to survive. Too often the free flow of capital that these trade agreements were designed to foster has benefited the rich nations and the wealthy classes of the poorer and emerging economies, leading to an even worse level of income inequality. Contained within the trade debate is the larger issue of neoliberalism, sometimes called the “Washington Consensus,” referring to the push from the United States to keep markets in developing nations open and available for investment and trade agreements favorable to the United States. The real impact of foreign investment, and disagreements among and between Latin American governments over the impact of earlier liberal and recent neoliberal policies, is a topic that weaves through this text.

Although critics point to the detrimental impact of free-trade deals on agricultural production, especially in Mexico, the fact is that most people throughout Latin America live in cities. By 1970 the majority of the population was involved in non-agricultural production; that is, in the service sector, manufacturing, private and public bureaucracies, and the informal sector. The common assumption is that people making a living in the informal sector – selling what they can on the street, engaged in casual and day labor, or peddling “illegal” wares and services – are very poor. That may be true, with the exception of certain illegal activities such as prostitution, trading in contraband, and so on, in which case it is hard to make any overriding assumptions. Yet some entrepreneurs selling homemade crafts, foodstuffs, and other objects in local markets earn a good living – comparable to, or even better than, those employed in manufacturing and the formal economy. The national economy, however, suffers because of the difficulty of collecting taxes on informal-sector earnings.

A sizeable middle class has emerged in most of the continent’s large cities, concentrated in growing domestic and transnational manufacturing sectors, financial and commercial institutions, government bureaucracies and service sectors, and traditional professional occupations. Probably owing to the precariousness of its position, the middle class historically has not been a strong voice in the political arena. By the late twentieth century, however, this previously timid group had become a more sustained and consistent actor in many emerging democracies, as well as active participants in street demonstrations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and, surprisingly, Cuba.

Politics

The Latin American political landscape has been as diverse as its geography and culture. Since the end of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in the nineteenth century, the region has been host to monarchies, local strongman (*caudillo*) rule, populist regimes, participatory democracy of parliamentary, socialist, and capitalist varieties, military and civilian dictatorships, and bureaucratic one-party states, to name

a few. The United States has played a strong role, especially during the twentieth century. The lament of Mexico's autarchic leader, Porfirio Díaz, could be said to apply to the continent as a whole: "So far from God, so close to the United States." The late British historian Eric Hobsbawm once remarked wryly that Latin America's proximity to the United States has had the effect of it being "less inclined than any other part of the globe to believe that the USA is liked because 'it does a lot of good round the world.'"¹

Modern Latin America's history is replete with conflict resulting from the unequal distribution of resources among and between nations, classes, racial and ethnic groups, and individuals. In the nineteenth century, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay went to war against Paraguay from 1864 to 1870 in the War of the Triple Alliance (sometimes called the Paraguayan War). This devastating conflict wiped out over half of Paraguay's population, more than 80 percent of its men. The most extensive war, the Mexican Revolution of 1910–21, resulted in the death of an estimated 1.5 million people both on and off the battlefield, of a population of 15 million. Other twentieth-century conflicts considered highly costly in terms of human life were the War of the Chaco between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932–5), in which an estimated 150,000 people died, and the civil conflict in Guatemala (1960–96), in which at least 200,000 Guatemalan Indians and mestizos were killed at the direction of a series of brutal military regimes. The country whose history has been most associated with violence is Colombia. From 1948 to 1966 an estimated 200,000–500,000 Colombians (the number varies widely) died in a war between political parties and factions that is known as *La Violencia*. According to Human Rights Watch, nearly 100,000 people have been killed since 2006 in relation to the Mexican drug war, a situation that will only worsen so long as the United States remains a major consumer of illegal drugs.

One erroneous stereotype, however, depicts Latin America as *exceptionally* violent, as a place of war, unstable governments, and social strife. In actuality, probably fewer Latin Americans have died as participants in wars and revolutions than is the case in other continents. This is due in large part to the relatively small role Latin American nations played in history's major international conflagrations, especially World Wars I and II. Unfortunately, the number of casualties throughout the world has been tremendous: the 20–30 million who died in the Taiping Rebellion in China (1850–64), at least 1.5 million casualties in the US Civil War, the massacre of an estimated 1.6 million Armenians in 1915–16, the World War II Holocaust, the millions who died in Eastern Europe and the USSR as a result of Stalin's policies, the Cambodians left to die in the "killing fields" of Pol Pot (1968–79), or the 1994 Rwanda Genocide in which anywhere from 600,000 to 1 million Tutsis and their Hutu sympathizers were killed in 100 days. The fact that Latin Americans have not historically killed each other in rebellions nor carried out mass slaughters in any greater number than peoples in other parts of the world (and probably fewer) draws into question the cultural stereotyping to which the region has been subjected.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, progressive leaders elected to office in many countries of Latin America attempted to find solutions to the longstanding problems of widespread poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, human rights abuses,

and inequality. This political phenomenon, sometimes labeled the “Pink Tide,” refers to the election of left and center-left governments in many Latin American countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Uruguay, and Venezuela. As opposed to the Cold War label, “the Red Tide,” that implied the spread of communism from the Soviet Union and China to other parts of the world, this “Pink Tide” was a milder, “less Red,” political current. In recent years this leftist presence has lost strength at the ballot box and/or has been decidedly driven back through extra-legal measures such as “soft coups” in Brazil and Bolivia. The process of enacting deep-seated reform in countries long ruled by authoritarian governments with disproportionately extensive militaries is never easy. Most of the economies are dependent on exporting goods to powerful consumer markets abroad. As a result, any attempt at income distribution has met with short-term success and fallen victim to international economic crises in 2008–9 and the across-the-board crisis brought on by the COVID pandemic beginning in late 2019.

Many of these elected socialist and leftist politicians were sympathetic to their own country’s revolutionary past, frequently voiced open admiration for Cuba’s stubborn rejection of US hegemony, and personally suffered under the military dictatorships that dominated much of the region from the 1960s to the 1990s. These pragmatic leftists did not follow a single political trajectory and never attempted to forge a united front. In fact, most remained loosely affiliated ideologically and pursued policies that benefited their own nations while seeking the broadest level of cooperation with like-minded, and even not so like-minded, neighbors. The assault on inequality was formidable, including lifting 70 million people out of poverty during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, reformers registered less success in combating climate change by imposing stringent environmental policies. As if to prove the point, progressive presidents in Paraguay and Honduras won office in fair elections, only to be overthrown within a few years, notably with the backing of the United States and powerful multinational corporations. If anything, events in these small nations proved once again that powerful foreign interests remain as obstacles to deep social reform.

Among the elected leaders of the early twenty-first century, Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez was the most outspoken, and most polarizing, opponent of US policy in Latin America and the one who forged close ties with Cuba’s Marxist government. Chávez’s death in March 2013 coincided with a downturn in Venezuela’s oil revenues, leading to instability under the less charismatic Nicolás Maduro, who assumed office upon Chávez’s death and was subsequently elected but accused of political repression and economic mismanagement. Large numbers of Venezuelans have fled to Colombia, a country that had sent many refugees to Venezuela over the past decade. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales supported the cultivation and sale of coca for medicinal and nutritional uses, much to the alarm of Washington. Morales used the clout of Bolivia’s vital energy resources in natural gas, oil, tin, and other minerals to bargain for better terms of trade with international bodies and for the political space to undertake a social reform agenda, despite objections from the country’s traditional ruling circles.

The new wave of progressive leaders faced powerful opponents inside their respective countries from the media, highly skilled and better paid workers, members of the traditional elite, and from the growing middle class who have felt threatened by policies

directed at uplifting rural and urban indigenous and marginalized poor. In Bolivia the conservative opposition forced Morales from office in late 2019 followed by a year of military rule, widespread accusations of human rights violations, and the highest number of attacks on civilians in over 40 years. In October 2020 Luis Arce, economic minister under Morales, was elected president on a platform of reinstating some MAS policies. In Brazil Dilma Rousseff of the left-wing Workers Party (PT) was elected and re-elected by wide margins. She then was impeached in a bold right-wing “soft coup” led by politicians who themselves were facing charges of widespread corruption.

The early twenty-first century was marked by an unprecedented number of women in national and local offices. With women comprising roughly one in four legislators in the region, a ratio only surpassed in Scandinavia, and with more female heads of state than any other area of the world, Latin America on the surface has, in terms of political officeholders, achieved a greater level of gender equity than have the United States. In Chile, Michelle Bachelet, the second socialist president elected since the demise of the military dictatorship in 1990, served from 2006 to 2010, and then was re-elected in 2013 after an interlude under the conservative government of Sebastián Piñera. In addition to Bachelet, the other women to head governments in the past as well as the present include, Isabel Perón in Argentina, 1974–6; Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua, 1990–97; Mireya Moscoso de Arias in Panama, 1999–2004; Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, president of Argentina, 2007–15; Laura Chinchilla, 2010–14 in Costa Rica; and Brazil’s Dilma Rousseff, elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014 before her impeachment and the election of right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. In 2021 Honduras elected Xiomara Castro as its first woman president.

Nonetheless, left-of-center presidents and legislators, female and male, have made limited strides in promoting the rights of women and taking on the issue of income inequality. In general, progressive governments have found that the goal of providing social benefits to the many poor, unhealthy, and uneducated people in their respective countries must be balanced against the fiscal discipline required to pay off the debt burden they inherited from previous authoritarian and military regimes. These twenty-first-century leaders have faced showdowns over attempts to amend and change constitutional limitations left over from dictators, and have scaled back plans for redistributing wealth in the face of the slowing of much of the world’s economy since 2008 (Figure 1.1). Staunchly conservative politicians have been elected in several countries, such as Bolsonaro in Brazil, with the backing of powerful media and export-oriented business leaders, as well as middle-class voters worried about holding on to their newfound gains.

Latin American presidents have likewise demonstrated a variety of views on one of Latin America’s most enduring institutions: the Catholic Church. Rafael Correa Delgado was elected president of Ecuador in 2006 and assumed office in January 2007. Considered one of the more leftist of the “Pink Tide” presidents, Correa described himself as a “Christian on the left” and as a “twenty-first-century socialist.” After earning a degree from the Catholic University of Guayaquil, Correa volunteered for a year in a Salesian mission, an order of Catholic priests known for their charity work with young children. He even seriously considered joining the priesthood but opted instead for a PhD in economics from the University of Illinois. He credits the Church for introducing



Figure 1.1 Official photograph of Chile's president Gabriel Boric and his cabinet of 10 men and 14 women in front of the Casa Moneda, Santiago, Chile, March, 2022. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

him to social justice issues. His successor, Guillermo Lasso, a former banker, was elected in 2021 and has been mainly preoccupied with containing Ecuador's inordinately high COVID-19 cases. Chile's Bachelet and Uruguay's former president, José Mujica, identified as atheists. The Church has opposed same-sex civil unions, marriage, and a range of reproductive freedoms for women in Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay, while political leaders ignore or openly oppose the Church's opinions. Chávez in Venezuela antagonized the church more openly than other leaders, despite being professed atheists. Paraguay elected a former bishop turned left-wing politician in 2008, only to have his presidency cut short when he was impeached in 2012. Fernando Armino Lugo Méndez was ousted in a politically motivated impeachment process that neighboring Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, along with most Latin American countries, denounced as a thinly veiled military coup. Lugo, as head of one of the poorest and smallest countries of Latin America that only recently emerged from 35 years of military rule under Alfredo Stroessner, drew his support from the majority poor and indigenous electorate. He was opposed by large landowners who drew on the tremendous power that Monsanto, Inc. exerted over Paraguayan agriculture. The giant corporation's imposition of genetically modified seeds in all farming was a factor in Lugo's overthrow. Subsequent presidents have been friendlier to the domestic landowners and Monsanto's genetically modified organisms agenda.

If presidents Correa and Lugo came to politics from a base in Catholic activism, Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega has moved away from socialism and toward conservative Christian fundamentalism. A former guerrilla commander who headed the leftist Sandinista government in the turbulent 1980s, he returned to power in 2007 under a political banner that includes few of the social reform measures or promises of equality from the earlier period. The Sandinista coalition split under a barrage of

accusations of corruption and human rights violations against Ortega and his closed circle of supporters. In a bid to curry favor with the Catholic hierarchy, Ortega imposed a ban on abortion even in cases where the mother's life is in danger. The March 2022 inauguration of Gabriel Boric as Chile's president is probably the strongest break with the patriarchal model of governance in Latin America. The young Boric's cabinet is majority female. In religious, economic, gender, social, and environmental policies, Latin America's leaders exhibit a variety of ideological stances.

Culture and Entertainment

Latin America and the Caribbean are a crazy quilt of nationalities, cultures, and language groups, representing nearly every part of the globe and creating a profoundly heterogeneous society from North to South. This diversity is manifest in many aspects of Latin American culture.

Literature

Archeologists have deciphered over 15 pre-Columbian distinct writing systems from Mesoamerican societies. The ancient Maya had the most sophisticated textually written language, but since texts were largely confined to the religious and administrative elite, traditions were passed down orally. Oral traditions prevailed in many major indigenous groups including, but not limited to, the Aztecs and other Nahuatl speakers, Quechua and Aymara of the Andean regions, the Quiché of Central America, the Tupi-Guaraní in today's Brazil, the Guaraní in Paraguay, and the Mapuche in Chile.

The contemporary reincarnation of an African and indigenous oral tradition can be found in the *testimonio* literature, the best-known, and controversial, example being the narrative of the life of Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan Indian woman whose graphic account of the persecution of her people in the 1980s has been widely read and translated into many languages. Although there have been some questions about the book's veracity, Menchú's story gripped readers' attention, much like Frederick Douglass's narrative of his life as a slave in the South of the United States a century earlier. These first-hand accounts cut through the political debates of the time. Menchú's testimony brought to the world's attention the persecution of Native Americans in the hemisphere, especially the genocide against the Quiché-Maya of her native Guatemala, where an estimated 200,000 people died during a string of brutal military dictatorships from 1978 to 1996. For her efforts, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 on the 500th anniversary of the European "discovery" of America.

Latin American literature has been particularly significant in its contribution to the world of letters. Nicaraguan-born poet Rubén Darío (1867–1916) has a place among the greats of the Spanish literary canon as the founder of modernism, a passionate, visual, and stylized form of poetry that broke with romanticism. Chile alone produced two of the major poets of the modern era, both of whom were awarded the

Nobel Prize in Literature: Gabriela Mistral in 1945 and Pablo Neruda in 1971. Mistral joins the handful of women worldwide who have received the prize in over a century of its existence. Other Latin American Nobel laureates include Miguel Ángel Asturias (1967), a Guatemalan author whose book *El Señor Presidente* set the standard for depictions of egomaniacal dictators; Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez (1982), whose work, especially *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, popularized the “magic realism” literary genre; and Mexican poet, novelist, and essayist Octavio Paz (1990), best known for *A Labyrinth of Solitude*, a meditation on modern Mexico and the unfulfilled goals of that nation’s turbulent 1910 Revolution. Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa (2010) won the prize for his innovative fiction and essays, but he also made a mark in the political arena when he ran unsuccessfully for his nation’s presidency in 1990 on a center-right platform.

The breadth and depth of literary production in Latin America over the past two centuries is impressive. The list includes Cuba’s José Martí, whose journalistic articles, essays, and poems were published in Spanish and English in the United States, Latin America, and Europe during his exile from Cuba in the late nineteenth century. Martí epitomized the symbiosis of politics and art that is quite prevalent among Latin American artists and writers, while others, including Argentines Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, and Luisa Valenzuela, exemplify artists’ concern with individual and existential crises. More overtly political authors whose works are widely read in English include Chile’s Isabel Allende, whose novel *The House of the Spirits* is often considered one of the best descriptions of the struggle against patriarchy. Julia Álvarez writes about life growing up in the Dominican Republic and the United States, and Rosario Ferré captures the impact of US colonialism on the lives of Puerto Rican men and women. The 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction went to *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz’s comment on the heartache and hilarity of adjusting as a Dominican immigrant in Paterson, New Jersey, while keeping one foot back on the island. Relishing controversy, Díaz followed up with *This Is How You Lose Her*, a book that so boldly examined Latino male culture that critics, especially feminists, disputed whether it promoted or opposed prevailing masculinist stereotypes and self-destructive misogyny. Cuban-American Richard Blanco, who read his poem “One Day” at Barack Obama’s second inauguration in 2013, was the first Latino and the first openly gay writer to perform at a presidential inauguration. Likewise, he was the youngest, and probably the only, poet with a degree in civil engineering to read at this event.

Mexican novelist and political figure Carlos Fuentes, journalist and essayist Elena Poniatowska, and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano have produced a prodigious body of work that combines history, lyricism, and sharp political analysis, mainly from the left. Finally, Augusto Roa Bastos of Paraguay shares with the Guatemalan Asturias a talent for capturing the personality of authoritarian Latin American leaders, as seen in his book *I, the Supreme*. Brazilian writers Machado de Assis, Jorge Amado, and Clarice Lispector draw on timeless themes in that nation’s history, including the treatment of women, the issue of racial and ethnic identity in a multicultural society, nature and realism, and the intersection of African and European-based spirituality in modern society.

Visual arts

While Latin American visual art in the eighteenth through nineteenth centuries borrowed closely from the traditions of Spanish, Portuguese, and French classical and baroque painting, much of it tied to religion, the influence of Africa and indigenous cultures permeates most artistic production. From the works of Colombian master painter Fernando Botero, whose fat cherubs are a biting criticism of Latin America's elite, to the photography of Sebastião Salgado, Brazil's contribution to the use of the photograph as a document, the world of Latin American visual art is as critical and joyfully diverse as its people. Notably, Botero's exposé of US torture in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison in a series of graphic and disturbing artworks stirred controversy in the United States in 2006. Another Brazilian, the architect Oscar Niemeyer, is considered one of the inventors of the modernist style and creator of the use of reinforced concrete for constructing some of the masterpieces of modern architecture, especially the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York and, with urban planner Lúcio Costa, the futurist capital city of Brasília (Figure 1.2). In 1996, at the advanced age of 89, he completed the Niterói Museum of Contemporary Art, across the bay from Rio de Janeiro. A lifelong socialist, Niemeyer designed an elaborate monument in Salvador da Bahia at the gravesite of Carlos Marighella, the country's most famous communist (who had trained as an architect).

Two major schools of painting that distinguish Latin American artists in the mind of the world today are the rich, colorful Haitian paintings that depict the complexity of



Figure 1.2 Brazilian National Congress being washed by rain. Architecture by Oscar Niemeyer. (Photo by EuricoZimbres, used under CC BY-SA 2.5 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5>), via Wikimedia Commons.)

everyday life, and Mexican murals of the 1930s and 1940s, which project a radical interpretation of history. In bold lines and dramatic colors, Haitian painting shows everyday people involved in commonplace events. Art historians assume this style of painting was common among artists as far back as the early nineteenth century, but it was not marketed commercially until the 1940s. Formulaic reproductions of standard scenes in wondrous colors can be bought from stalls in flea markets and on the streets of many cities of the world where Haitian artists peddle their wares; the highly skilled show their creations in the major galleries of the world, selling for six-figure dollar prices. Similarly, Mexican mural art links popular subjects and high-art world prices. The most famous muralists, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco told the story of Mexico's history from pre-Columbian times to the twentieth-century Revolution. They depicted the struggle for modernization and the clash of cultures, races, and classes in bold murals commissioned by the government of Mexico. World-famous for their political and ideological brashness and competitiveness, the muralists had a strong influence on Mexican and other Latin American art. Likewise, they set the standard for an art form that can be found on the walls of subways, aqueducts, buildings, and fences throughout the world. Frida Kahlo, whose work is today one of the most popular products of that era, is famous for her self-portraits that spell out the physical and emotional pain she experienced in life and, some argue, stand as a universalized statement of women's oppression. Although her personal life was troubled, fraught with conflict with her husband, Diego Rivera, whose art and fame overshadowed her career during her lifetime, Kahlo's paintings today command the highest prices of any Latin American artist.

Handicrafts are a widely known form of artistic expression in many Latin American countries. Especially in countries with a large indigenous population (such as Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Mexico), textiles, pottery, embroidery, weaving, crochet, and other crafts are produced in homes and small workshops. In some parts of the country, young girls are withdrawn from school after only a few years and put to work sewing, weaving, knitting, and otherwise producing the elaborate crafts that fill the markets of small tourist towns, stops along the highways, stores, and the huge open-air markets of major cities. The sheer quantity, variety, and ingenuity of crafts displayed in any one market can be mind-boggling, while the income from the sale of handicrafts is essential to the livelihood of entire families and regions.

In the 1970s a new use for a traditional handicraft, the *arpillera*, was developed and has since spread to many regions of Latin America. Chilean women imprisoned under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–90) created these three-dimensional textile pictures that depict a scene or tell a story. The women developed the *arpilleras* as a way of communicating with friends and families outside the prison. Into the intricately sewn pictures the prisoners incorporated sticks, pockets, pieces of aluminum foil, and other found items, all providing hiding places for messages. The images in the *arpilleras*, on careful examination, revealed scenes of the torture, abuse, and suffering that the women were enduring. Prison guards, assuming the *arpilleras* were simple women's sewing, did not suspect that hidden within the folds of the fabric the women were sending messages to the outside world of the repressive conditions in Chilean prisons. The craft form spread from prisons to neighborhoods on the outside, and later became a popular art form in communities in Chile, Peru,

and eventually throughout Latin America. Today *arpilleras* represent a significant source of income for women in cooperatives and shantytowns. They narrate life stories, including events such as weddings and festivals, and show the day-to-day life in which women live and work, plant and harvest crops, tend animals, cook, clean, and care for children.

Music and dance

Latin America's diversity may be most readily apparent in the rich variation of musical and dance forms. The thin, austere chants of music from the Andean Altiplano reflect indigenous sensitivities and invoke the harsh emptiness of the highlands of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile, while the pounding drumbeat and percussion of Brazil and the Caribbean definitely draw their inspiration from Africa. The Americas in general have elaborated on and enhanced the world's repertoire of sound, combining the instruments of Africa with the strings and horns of European musical tradition. Latin America's contribution includes the samba, marimba, merengue, cumbia, mariachi, reggae (and its contemporary hip-hop permutation, reggaeton), salsa, cha cha, bossa nova, and literally dozens of variations in between. Samba in Brazil and tango in Buenos Aires, as with jazz in the United States, traveled a similar route from bawdy, back-alley association with promiscuity and hot sex to popularity on the world stage. Only after gaining acceptance abroad did the domestic national elites embrace their homegrown musical and dance genres. Today, of course, they are considered the emblematic music of their respective countries, promoted and practiced among all social groups.

A key feature of Latin American music and dance is the intermingling of styles and forms, drawing on the wide variety of folk traditions and cultures developed in the countryside in both African and indigenous societies, from European imports, or blended with the latest in international pop or classical music. One of the earliest names to make its way to the world stage was that of classical composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, who incorporated the native sounds of Brazil into classical European-influenced pieces. In Argentina, Astor Piazzolla revolutionized tango into a new form fusing jazz and classical music. He was born in Argentina but spent years in New York City as a youth, where he learned both tango and jazz on the streets of Greenwich Village and Little Italy in the 1930s. In Piazzolla's *New York Times* obituary in 1992, music critic Stephen Holden wrote that the Argentine was the "world's foremost composer of tango music." The most universally known figure in Latin American entertainment is probably Carmen Miranda, a Portuguese-born Brazilian who sported wild, fruit-bowl hats in movies and stage acts. Extremely popular abroad (she was the most highly paid actress in Hollywood during the 1940s), her outlandish hats and "hot Latin" image were seen by many Brazilians as a demeaning stereotype.

The 1960s Brazilian movement called *tropicalismo* – developed by Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil (Minister of Culture, 2003–8), Gal Costa, Maria Bethânia, Tom Zé, and others – was an expression of the fusion of various musical forms, from Portuguese *sado* to samba and bossa nova to contemporary Latin and international rock and pop.

Jon Pareles, music critic of the *New York Times*, in an article recommending Veloso's albums *Estrangeiro* and *Livro*, called Caetano Veloso "one of the greatest living songwriters."

As with literature, Latin American music has played a central role in criticizing conservative politics and human rights abuses and as a tool for bolstering movements for social change, many of them on the left. Víctor Jara, a famous Chilean folk singer who was tortured and killed in the early days of the 1973 military coup against Salvador Allende's socialist government, was part of a Latin America-wide folk revival, the New Song Movement (*la Nueva Canción*). The movement was inspired by the work of the now-deceased folk singers Mercedes Sosa of Argentina and Chile's Violeta Parra. The large instrumentalist and choral groups Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani popularized the music of the New Song Movement in concerts throughout the world, both during the heady days of the Allende government and later during the Pinochet dictatorship as they traveled the world in exile.

Today's music scene has witnessed a blending of styles from Latin America, the United States, and Europe (Figure 1.3). The borders that previously separated the Americas are now porous for both people and music; Latin American rhythms regularly float from mainstream US and European radio. Carried with the migrant culture, Latin pop has introduced new forms of hip-hop that bear the stamp of *plena* and *bomba* styles from Latin America, and incorporate the strong social critique often expressed in US rap music along with, regrettably, a fair share of misogynist and violent lyrics. The rhythm of Latin music accompanies the migration of people from Latin America into major urban areas and even into the more sparsely settled Midwestern heartland. Latin music has become mainstream in the United States and in much of the world with the appearance (sometimes



Figure 1.3 Colombian singer Shakira, right, and Argentine folk legend Mercedes Sosa at "The Concert for the Children" in Buenos Aires, May 17, 2008. The concert is one of many sponsored by Shakira's ALAS foundation (*América Latina en Acción Solidaria*), which raises money to improve the lives of impoverished children in Latin America. (Getty photo)

fleeting) of a host of names, including Pitbull, Enrique Iglesias, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Romeo Santos, Luis Fonsi, Maluma, Selena, Bad Bunny, and Ricky Martin, to name a few. Megastar Cardi B, as the daughter of a Dominican father and Trinidadian mother, grew up speaking Spanish at home and in the heavily Latino neighborhoods in New York City, but made her name in mainstream rap performances for mixed audiences.

Cinema and television

At the 2006 Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles, critics were abuzz with commentary on the “Three Amigos,” an adaptation of the title of a 1986 slapstick comedy starring Steve Martin, Chevy Chase, and Martin Short. In 2006 the “three friends” were Mexican film directors Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Alfonso Cuarón. Each had directed and produced movies that were in contention for the top prizes, including Best Picture. That these filmmakers had Oscar-nominated movies was not as novel as the fact that the movies in contention (*Pan’s Labyrinth*, *Children of Men*, and *Babel*) were not based in Mexico, nor did they star or pertain to Latin American personalities or themes. Their earlier movies, such as *Y Tu Mamá También*, *Amores Perros*, and *21 Grams*, had brought actors Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna to the attention, and admiration, of a young US audience. The fame of today’s Latin American directors, who have gone on to direct and produce Oscar-winning and nominated films, including *The Shape of Water*, *The Revenant*, *Gravity*, and *Birdman*, among others, builds on a line of cinematic achievements stretching back to *Black Orpheus* in 1959. This Brazilian movie by French director Marcel Camus, an adaptation of the classic Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice set in Rio de Janeiro during Carnival, introduced the world to Brazilian culture, music, and racial themes. It won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as an Oscar and Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film (for France). In 2018 Cuarón won Best Director for *Roma*, a film in Spanish set in Mexico City. Along with the Best Director award, the film won and was nominated in many other categories, making it one of the most successful foreign-language winners in Academy history.

The 1960s and 1970s brought international success to Argentine director Fernando Solanas (*Hour of the Furnaces*) and Chilean Patricio Guzmán (*Battle of Chile*), whose powerful political documentaries captured the imagination of young people in the United States and Europe. The directors interspersed news footage with a montage of symbols from political struggles in other countries, as well as snippets of acting and drama, to create *cinema verité* documentary films. Argentina had been a leader in the film industry in the early years of the twentieth century, but suffered under the military government from 1976 to 1983 only to re-emerge with an Academy Award-winning film, *The Official Story*, in 1985. The country has since begun a frenzy of filmmaking, with a number of critically acclaimed movies, including *Social Genocide*, Solanas’s 2004 exposé of corrupt politicians who sold off Argentine resources and bankrupted the economy.

Brazil’s film industry, the largest and best financed in the region, has produced well-known directors such as Walter Salles (*Central Station*), Bruno Barreto (*Dona Flor and*

Her Two Husbands), Héctor Babenco (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*), and several well-received films about harsh life in the *favelas* (shantytowns) and on the streets of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, including *Pixote*, *City of God*, *Bus 174*, and the most controversial, *Elite Squad*, winner of various film festival prizes. The much-praised 2019 feature film *Bacurau* used a series of violent and bizarre events in a remote village as a metaphor for the troubled politics of contemporary Brazil. Finally, Cuban films, such as *Memories of Underdevelopment*, a studied meditation on the role of the intellectual in the early days of the Revolution and the choice between staying in Cuba or going into exile, along with *Strawberry and Chocolate*, *Lucía*, *Portrait of Teresa*, *Before Night Falls*, and *The Last Supper*, have won for Cuba a place in the international cinema arena. This is quite astonishing considering Cuba's tiny size, small capacity for filmmaking, scarce resources, and the oversight of official censors.

Although film has achieved international commendation, most Latin Americans watch far more television than movies. Not all Latin American households have a refrigerator, but most have a television – essential for watching soccer games, news, and the nighttime soap operas or *telenovelas*. The *telenovela*, one of the most widespread expressions of popular culture in Latin America, is a basic staple of both daytime and nighttime programming and the main source of support for many channels. Like soap operas, which some consider a distant North American cousin but are now almost extinct, the *telenovela* examines personal and family themes. Plots revolve around power relations in work and domestic settings, “bad” women, love rivalries and triangles, and paternity disputes. According to sociologist José Antonio Guevara, the typical *telenovela* theme is the struggle to found a traditional family: falling in love, marrying, and having children. It pursues this theme by showing the contrasting lives of rich and poor, good and evil. From this tension the melodrama develops its plot, which is often based on a projection of reality drawn from an historical event or torn from the pages of the news, like some police, courtroom, and hospital dramas shown on US television. Whereas a soap opera saga never ends (unless it goes off the air, as many are now doing) since the events with which their characters struggle are timeless and cannot be solved, the goal of the *telenovela* is to solve the problems of society, usually in a three-to-four-month series, and even to teach a way to resolve the tensions inherent in the progress of human events. Since 2010 an updated form, the *millennial telenovela*, has begun to displace the traditional themes of the old melodramas. Designed to appeal to a younger, hipper audience, the shows grapple with representations of LGBT+ characters, contemporary political and cultural struggles, and intersections of racial/gender/cultural themes.

Since *telenovelas* play at night, they are a main source of entertainment for entire families, even whole communities and nations (including millions of US Latinx households). The plot will be discussed at the office the next day and become part of the analogies, references, and metaphors around which day-to-day life is constructed. The *telenovela*, to borrow a phrase from Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, is, in terms of entertainment, hegemonic; that is, it depicts and preaches the “shared common sense” of Latin American societies. The recent spread of Netflix and other online streaming channels has cut into the dominance of the *telenovela* broadcasting networks.

Sports

Latin America has a broad and varied array of athletic competitions, although *fútbol* (called *futebol* in Brazil and soccer in the United States) is probably the most widespread national pastime. British sailors introduced soccer to most South American countries in the latter half of the nineteenth century when they played pick-up games while on shore leave, sometimes among themselves and then increasingly with local youths. Charles Miller, the son of a Paulista merchant, is thought to have brought two soccer balls from England to Brazil in the 1890s with the purpose of setting up matches between teams of young British employees of the Gas Company, the London and Brazilian bank, and the São Paulo Railway Company. In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, European football was eventually absorbed into the lives of working men and boys through local, often ethnically-based, clubs. A game that can be played anywhere, requiring only a ball and a few eager players, it was easily adopted by the working poor, some of whom made do with less than a ball. Today, innovative boys, and a growing number of girls, can be seen on vacant lots or in the street, passing wadded up balls of paper or string, crushed cans, or some other makeshift ball with the same fancy footwork one might expect to find in an official game with a regulation ball. Brazil is the only country to have won five FIFA World Cups, but its reputation as a soccer powerhouse has undergone change in recent years. The team's lackluster performance in 2006 amidst charges of corruption was overshadowed in 2014 when Germany handed the Seleção (as the national team is known) a humiliating 7–1 drubbing in the quarterfinal in front of a hometown crowd in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais.

Brazil's loss on its home turf came after months of unprecedented demonstrations against what many Brazilians have called misplaced priorities: wasteful government spending of more than \$11 billion of taxpayer funds on stadiums and other preparations, at the expense of badly needed improvements in education, health care, and infrastructure. Argentina went on to the final, losing to Germany by a much closer margin. The performance of Latin American and African teams is at a disadvantage because they only play together during World Cup and other international and hemispheric competitions every few years, since most players live abroad while pursuing lucrative professional careers with teams in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Nonetheless, soccer remains the top spectator sport in most Latin American nations, dominating the airwaves and, some might argue, the national psyche of most men and boys.

In parts of the Caribbean and Central America *béisbol* outshines soccer in terms of popularity. The sport took hold especially in the Dominican Republic and Cuba in the late nineteenth century, when sugar companies imported cane cutters from the British Caribbean. The workers played cricket in their free time, but later, during the long periods of US military occupation, cricket gave way to baseball, which rapidly assumed widespread popularity, although cricket remains the favorite in the British Caribbean. Baseball has the greatest following in those nations occupied at length by the US military, especially Nicaragua, Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, but the

sport has enjoyed popularity in the Netherlands Antilles and Venezuela as well. All of these countries have emerged as sources of baseball talent, since many players hone their skills on local teams, or in “academies” managed by the US Major Leagues to cultivate the most promising young men for their own teams.

Critics charge that the Major Leagues exploit players from poor backgrounds, signing them to contracts at prices far below what US players would command and robbing much poorer countries of their best talent. Others argue that players now negotiate through shrewd lawyers and agents for respectable salaries, although still a pittance compared to what they will make if truly successful in the United States. Both baseball and soccer create, nurture, and then export great players for the sports industry in developed countries – a process not unlike that accorded to other Latin American “commodities.” Cuba fields a top-notch national team that competes on its own turf and in international competitions, while Curaçao and other former Dutch colonies compete as a part of the Netherlands and have sent players to the Majors. During the years of the embargo, Cuba contributed talent to the Major Leagues through the defections of players such as José Contreras, José Fernández, and half-brothers Liván and Orlando (El Duque) Hernández. No doubt scouts for the professional teams were tabulating their prospects for signing young Cuban talent before the ink was dry on Obama’s diplomatic initiatives in late 2014. Since the diplomatic breakthrough has stalled under subsequent administrations, the influx of Cuban players has likewise remained frozen. The drain of sports talent, like that of Latin America’s skilled professionals, workers, and the poor, will probably continue as long as the dramatic income inequalities between the United States and countries to the south persist.

All in Latin America is not soccer and baseball, however. A look at the competitions and medal winners at the past few Olympic Games illustrates the breadth of sports in the region. For example, although Argentina is a perennial powerhouse in soccer and produced two of the game’s legendary players, Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi, it was the Women’s Field Hockey team that brought home the most Olympic medals, from Sydney (2000), Athens (2004), Beijing (2008), and London (2012). Vanina Oneto, who scored four goals in the championship match against New Zealand in 2008, enjoys national stardom for her performance in the international competitions. The Argentine women’s field hockey teams are among the best in the world, followed, in terms of success, by the men’s teams. Peruvian and Brazilian women’s volleyball teams are top contenders in international matches, while in wrestling, boxing, and some track and field events Cuban men and women rank first or second in the world.

The Olympics and Pan-American Games have served as a showcase for a variety of talented athletes. The 1968 games in Mexico City, the only ones until Rio de Janeiro in 2016 to be hosted in a Latin American country, entered the history books for several firsts, including the first time a woman, Enriqueta Basilio, a Mexican hurdler, lit the Olympic Cauldron. It was also the first time that African distance runners swept up the medals, in part because they had trained at high altitudes and were not handicapped by Mexico City’s location at more than 7,000 feet above sea level. The 1968 Olympics elicited the most protests, including the Black Power salute on the winners’ block from the

US medalists as a mark of solidarity with the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Finally, the 1968 games were preceded by a brutal massacre of students in Tlatelolco Square, in downtown Mexico City, a month before they opened. The event drew attention to the repressive single-party government that had ruled Mexico since the 1930s and that, similar to Brazil's left-wing government in 2016, poured massive amounts of money into preparations for the international athletic competition while the majority of Mexicans continued to live in desperate poverty.

Despite Latin American nations having fielded many teams in the Olympics, the games only returned to the continent in 2016 and the Olympic Torch only passed through South America for the first time in 2004 on its way to the games in Greece. On June 13, 2004, one of the world's foremost athletes, Edson Arantes do Nascimento, known to the world as Pelé (Figure 1.4), ran through the streets of Rio de Janeiro with the torch before passing it on. Pelé, one of the most skilled players in the history of soccer, is credited with bringing Brazil to the forefront of world competition. In July 2008, at the age of 67, Pelé opened the game in Cape Town, South Africa, at a world soccer match commemorating former president Nelson Mandela on his 90th birthday. While celebrating the 2014 Brazilian games, the soccer icon nonetheless criticized the government for spending too much, saying at a press conference in May 2014 that the games were diverting too much money from schools and hospitals. Since Brazil's team for the 2022 World Cup is considered one of its best, it remains to be seen if victory on the playing field will erase the acrimony of the Rio games (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.4 Pelé and the “bicycle kick” in a 1968 match between Brazil and Belgium. Other players have repeated the move, but it was made famous as Pelé’s signature play. Source: Popperfoto/Getty Images.



Figure 1.5 Over a million people throughout Brazil demonstrated against the 2014 World Cup in the months before and during the international games. Signs called for FIFA (the world soccer federation) to “go home” and condemned the waste of money and resources on the game while Brazil needed schools, hospitals, and better infrastructure.

Latin America: Past and Present

Today it is impossible to consider the future of the United States without taking into account the countries of Latin America. Whereas politics, wars, perennial crises, and major celebrations and commemorations in other parts of the world may take center stage at one time or another, the people and cultures of Latin America remain one of the foremost external influences on life in the United States. From concerns over drug trafficking in Colombia and Mexico to the latest Latin American singing sensation, to the never-ending debate over border patrols and immigration policy, the past, present, and future of the United States and Latin America are interwoven, straddling their respective political, economic, and cultural landscapes. For that reason alone it is essential that US students (large numbers of whom trace their origin to the countries of the Caribbean, and Central and South America), as well as the general public, learn and understand the history of this vital region of the world.

Latin America is not simply a neighbor to the United States. It has produced world-class athletes, artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers, scientists, inventors, politicians, and more. The fate of its rivers, wetlands, and rainforests, and of the thousands of plants, animals, and natural resources they produce, matters to us all and affects the quality of life on Earth. Latin America is a tremendous repository of resources, but it is likewise a

land whose people, along with the languages they speak and the cultures they reflect, are having a major impact on the entire world, not just on its northern neighbors.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. The author states that Latin America is extremely diverse. What are the major racial and ethnic characteristics of this diversity? What are the features of Latin American environmental and geographic diversity?
2. Historians argue over the reason for inequality in Latin America. State the various arguments that historians and other observers have advanced to explain economic inequality. What do the historians draw on to support their conclusions and how do you evaluate this evidence?
3. What was the “Pink Tide”? Name a few socialist and leftist politicians in Latin America from that era and discuss their backgrounds. What were their differing political stances on issues such as religion, war, gender equality, domestic social programs, and foreign policy, particularly toward other countries in the hemisphere?
4. What are some of the characteristics of modern Latin American culture – from literature, to art, to music and dance, to movies, television, and sports? Research one cultural figure or cultural movement mentioned in the text and present your findings to the class.
5. Why should we in the United States study Latin America? What is the importance of Latin America’s history for our understanding of the world?

Note

- 1 Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: The New Press, 2005), p. 383.