



The Indian Question in Latin America

Throughout Latin America today, Indians find themselves embroiled in a wide range of national controversies, from radical politics in Peru to environmental disputes in Brazil. Yet, as *New York Times* journalist Alan Riding once noted, Latin American scholarship has offered little systematic study of these Indians—of their place in post-Columbian history or of their condition in the present. The Indians, for their part, have become increasingly assertive. Last year, on Ecuador's Columbus Day, representatives of nine Indian nations gathered in Quito to demand a native version of New-World history. Here, our contributors provide just that. Through their perspectives, the approaching Columbus quincentennial takes on a different meaning: the 500th year of Indian resistance.

PERU'S GREAT DIVIDE

by Peter F. Klarén

The *Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* (1986), Mario Vargas Llosa's fictional portrait of a Peruvian revolutionary, captures in its opening pages the desperate poverty that has become commonplace throughout the South American nation. The narrator of the novel, a writer himself, is out for an early morning jog through his neighborhood when he comes across "stray kids, stray men, and stray women along with the stray dogs, all painstakingly digging through the trash looking for something to eat, something to sell, something to wear. The spectacle of misery was once limited exclusively to the slums, then it spread downtown, and now it is the common property of the whole city, even the exclusive residential neighborhoods—Miraflores, Barranco, San Isidro. If you live in Lima, you can get used to misery and grime, you can go crazy, or you can blow your brains out."

Or, if you happen to be Vargas Llosa, you can make a bid for your country's presidency—an unsuccessful bid, as it turned out. The disappointed novelist will doubtless find it small consolation that the winner of the June election, Alberto Fujimori, faces an all-but-impossible task.

Even by Latin American standards, Peru today is a deeply troubled country. For a quarter of a century, its economy has stagnated as a result of chronic government mismanagement and corruption, and declining world demand for its top exports—copper, oil, industrial metals, and fishmeal. Its rapid population growth (2.5 percent

annually) puts it in the same unenviable league with Bangladesh and Burkina Faso.

Since 1987, when President Alan García Pérez's two-year-old economic recovery program ended in a disastrous nationalization of the banks and other financial institutions, the economy has tumbled into a virtual free fall. National output has dropped by more than 25 percent (per capita), while inflation has reached the proportions of a fiscal disaster—by one recent reckoning, the annual rate exceeds 3,000 percent. The Peruvian worker lucky enough to hold a job now earns less in real terms than he did in 1965.

The economic disaster has jeopardized Peru's fragile 10-year-old democracy—the longest spell of uninterrupted civilian rule since 1895–1914. But it has also been, in an ironic way, its salvation. According to the *New York Times*, the army was deterred from staging a coup against García's paralyzed government in part because the generals were "intimidated by the prospect of taking over" the chaotic country.

A greater threat to Peru's future is the growth of the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrilla movement. Since Sendero launched its "People's War" a decade ago, 18,000 Peruvians have died, most of them innocent civilians killed by the guerrillas or the army. Last year alone the death toll was 3,198.

Ultraradical is the only word to describe Sendero's ideological pedigree. Its doctrines, as propounded by its founder, Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, are Maoist. Guzmán, in the words of journalist Gustavo Gorriti, "considers Mao's Cultural Revolu-

tion to be humankind's most splendid moment, except that it wasn't radical enough." In its murderous fanaticism, Sendero bears a frightening resemblance to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. But in many ways, Sendero is a familiar Peruvian phenomenon. Like other political groups throughout Peruvian history, it has cynically exploited what might be called the Indian question.

Sendero was born in the remote department of Ayacucho in the southern Andean highlands—an area *Limeños* disdainfully refer to as “*la mancha india*,” or the “Indian stain.” Ayacucho is a place of incredible isolation and poverty. Its residents are mostly monolingual Quechua speakers; illiteracy is 68.5 percent. The infant mortality rate (12.8 percent) is the highest in the world, and life expectancy, at only 51 years, among the lowest. Arriving at the local university during the early 1960s, Guzmán gradually developed his unique brand of agrarian communism and attracted a devoted coterie of students, many of them members of the first generation of Indians to attend the university. These followers became the nucleus of Sendero, spreading the theories of the man who proclaimed himself—after Marx, Lenin, and Mao—the Fourth Sword of Marxism.

In recent years the movement has spread to some of Peru's more important regions, including Lima itself. There it has found converts among the poverty-stricken Indian and *mestizo* inhabitants of the wretched *pueblos jóvenes* (young towns) that have sprung up around the city. But in many ways more threatening to the Peruvian state is the dominant presence that

Sendero has established in the Andes' Upper Huallaga Valley, some 250 miles northeast of Lima. From this subtropical region on the eastern slope of the Andes comes half of the world's supply of coca paste, the thick greenish compound of mashed coca leaves and kerosene that is the basis of cocaine. Sendero has entrenched itself in the valley by providing protection against the authorities—including U.S.-sponsored drug eradication programs—to the roughly 70,000 peasant farmers who grow coca. The guerrillas collect perhaps \$30 million annually in “taxes” from the Colombian drug traffickers who control Peru's coca trade. That frees Sendero of the need for foreign support and makes it probably the wealthiest guerrilla movement in modern history—so wealthy that it reportedly is able to pay its 5,000–7,000 fighters a regular salary.

But Sendero probably would not exist were it not for events that took place four centuries ago (and Guzmán's shrewd ability to exploit them). The enormous gulf that the brutal 16th-century Spanish conquest opened between victors and vanquished remains a dominant fact of life in contemporary Peru. The Spanish created a society in which a tiny ruling class, the *conquistadores*, and later their creole descendants, came utterly to dominate Peru's Indian, *mestizo*, and black majority.

Francisco Pizarro arrived in northern Peru late in 1531 with only 150 men, excited by tales of the Inca's great wealth and bent on repeating the pattern of conquest and plunder that was becoming practically routine in the New World. The

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Inca never seemed to appreciate the threat they faced. And their empire, stretching some 3,000 miles from present-day Chile to Ecuador, was embroiled in a civil war between the two sons of the late emperor. The Inca Empire was in fact little more than 100 years old at the time; the Inca were only the most recent unifiers of the centuries-old Andean civilizations.

When Pizarro insisted on an audience with Atahualpa, the prince who had gained the upper hand in the civil war, the Inca leader arrived amid thousands of his subjects, borne on a golden throne. To the Inca, of course, the Spanish seemed the exotics. "To our Indian eyes," wrote Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, the author of a later chronicle, "the Spaniards looked as if they were shrouded like corpses. Their faces were covered with wool, leaving only the eyes visible, and the caps which they wore resembled little red pots on top of their heads."

Guamán Poma says the Spaniards demanded that Atahualpa renounce his gods and accept a treaty with Spain. He refused. "The Spaniards began to fire their muskets and charged upon the Indians, killing them like ants. At the sound of the explosions and the jingle of bells on the horses' harnesses, the shock of arms and the whole amazing novelty of their attackers' appearance, the Indians were terror-stricken. They were desperate to escape from being trampled by the horses and in their headlong flight a lot of them were crushed to death." Guamán Poma goes on to say that countless Indians died, compared to only five of the Spaniards, "and these few casualties



The great Inca uprising that began in Cuzco in 1536 was the most serious challenge to the authority of the Spanish colonizers. The drawing comes from Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's Nueva corónica y buen gobierno (c. 1600).

were not caused by the Indians, who had at no time dared to attack the formidable strangers."

Pizarro captured Atahualpa and held him for a tremendous ransom, then executed him after it was paid. In November 1533, with an army of 5,000 Indian allies, the Spaniards marched on the Incas' mountain capital at Cuzco and easily prevailed. After an epic battle three years later, in which the Indians rebelled and almost retook Cuzco, the Spanish consolidated their hold over the former Inca Empire. Within 70 years, the Indian population had suffered a complete demographic collapse, dropping from nine million to only one million. Famine, culture shock, and systematic exploitation made the Indians particularly vulnerable to the lethal epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other new diseases the Spaniards brought to the New World.

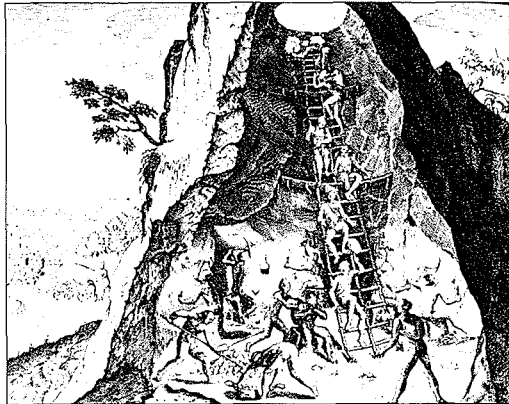
That was not the end of the Andean peoples' demoralization. The Spaniards plundered their cities and temples and then, especially after the discovery in 1545 of the great silver mines at Potosí (in what is now Bolivia), virtually enslaved them. Peru, as

historian Fredrick B. Pike writes, became "Spain's great treasure house in South America."

Like the Spaniards who conquered the Maya and Aztecs to the north, Pizarro and his successors installed themselves as the new overlords of the existing society—a society they altered in many ways to suit their own needs. The result was the development of what scholars call a "dualistic" society. This "dualism" continues to manifest itself in virtually every aspect of Peruvian life. It begins geographically, with the dramatic contrast between the coast and the sierra. The desert coastal strip, which is only 11 miles wide in places but stretches some 1,400 miles along the Pacific, is the historic center of Hispanic power. The Andes, which rise in three parallel ranges to the east, culminating in jagged, snow-covered volcanic peaks more than 15,000 feet tall, are the domain of the Indians who resisted Hispanization and bore the brunt of the colonial order.

The arid coast, with Lima at its center, is the site of Peru's modern, capitalist sector. Here are the export-oriented sugar and cotton haciendas, strung along three dozen lush river valleys that lie like green ribbons across the coastal desert. (Peru's coast receives less annual rainfall than does the Sahara.) Here too are most of Peru's auto and textile plants, fishmeal factories, and oil refineries: Seventy percent of Peru's manufacturing capacity can be found in and around Lima.

When Pizarro founded Lima in 1535 as the seat of Spain's most important viceroyalty in the New World, he aimed to reorient trade, commerce, and power away from the Andes and toward imperial Spain and Europe. Lima became the jewel of Spanish South America, with a tradition of looking toward Madrid. Even when Latin America was swept by independence movements during the early 19th century, Lima's cre-



Indians from Peru and other Spanish colonies were forced to work the silver mines of Potosí.

ole elite remained loyal to the crown. It took Latin America's Venezuelan-born liberator, Simón Bolívar, to drive the Spanish from Peru in 1824. But long after Peruvian independence, Lima retained its Spanish and pseudocosmopolitan flavor. During the 1960s, one observer wrote of Lima's privileged class that "scores could boast of being at home in London, Paris, Rome, New York, Washington, or San Francisco, and at the same time admit to being total strangers to that part of their native country which lay appreciably beyond the immediate confines of the capital and a handful of other coastal cities." Not for nothing has Lima been called "a city searching for a country."

Since World War II, however, Lima has been transformed by Peru's second demographic revolution. Long a city whose pride greatly exceeded its population, it has been bloated during the past few decades by an influx of Indians and *mestizos* from the interior. By 1961 it had grown to 1.5 million; today it is an unmanageable metropolis of almost seven million. About the size of Chicago, it now claims nearly a third of Peru's population. Overall, the coast is now home to about 60 percent

of the population, reversing the proportions that had prevailed for centuries.

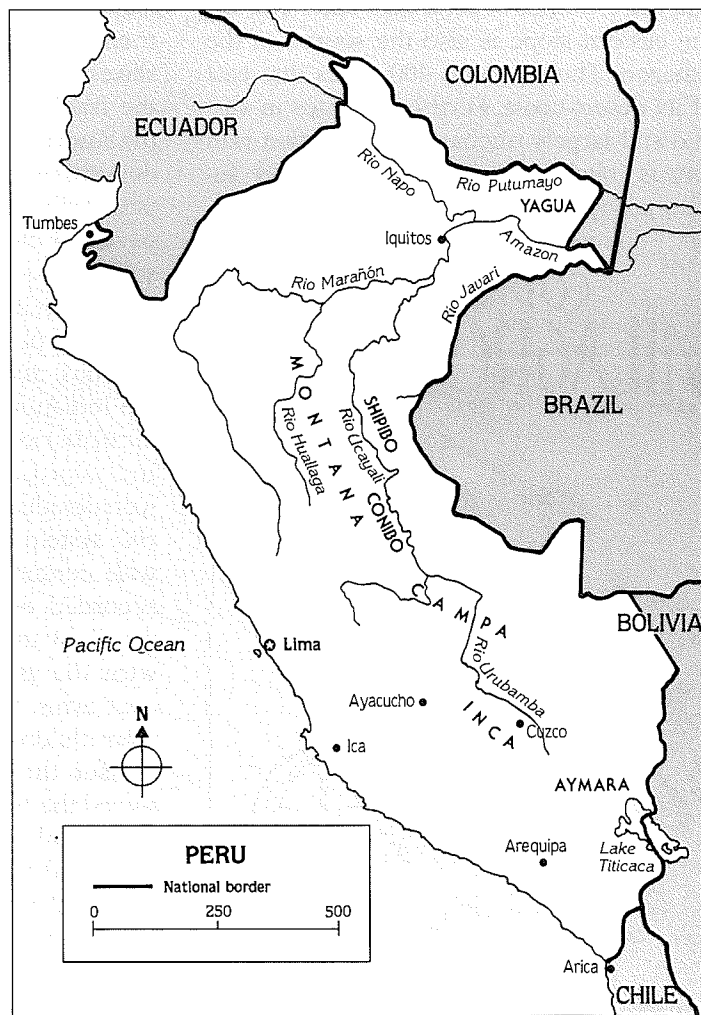
Beyond Lima and the coastal strip lies another, largely Indian, world. One could almost say several other worlds, so great is the variation in climate and terrain as the land rises away from the coast. It is here in the Andean highlands that the bulk of the country's rural people, the 8.2 million Quechua-speaking and 250,000 Aymara-speaking Indians and *mestizos*, eke out a marginal living.

Inevitably, the long dominance of the coast has contributed greatly to the underdevelopment of the interior. Only about five percent of the sierra is arable, while about a quarter is marginal pastureland where cows, sheep, llamas, and vicunas can be grazed. As a result of the conquest, these lands that once fed the Inca Empire were long ago beset by chronic low productivity. Peru today suffers periodic food shortages, forcing it to spend precious foreign exchange to import food, even the indigenous potato, in order to feed its swollen coastal cities.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Inca and their predecessors laced the mountainsides with intricate terraces and irrigation systems that still awe visitors today. Through a sophisticated system of agricultural production and exchange that scholars call "vertical archipelagos," each Inca community, or *ayllu*, worked land at different alti-

tudes in order to cultivate crops that could only be grown in certain climatic niches. As anthropologist John Murra has shown, the Indians thus managed to overcome the obstacles thrown up by nature and to provide themselves with a rich and varied diet.

Directly above the coastal strip, in the foothills of the Andes, is a sparsely inhabited terrain that climbs to perhaps 7,500 feet. Above that is a pleasant temperate



The Indians of Peru today make up about 45 percent of the nation's population. Once concentrated in the highland regions, they have been moving to the coastal cities in large numbers since 1945. Major tribes and their locations appear above.

band, where maize, vegetables, and fruits can be grown. Here the Inca built Cuzco, Cajamarca, and their other principle cities. Above this relatively populated strip are several others, all increasingly inhospitable, ranging from the *Suni*, where the Inca cultivated potatoes and other tubers unique to the Andes, to the vast wind-blasted *Altiplano*, a frigid world of grassy tablelands where shepherds still herd llama, alpaca, and vicuna. The eastern slope of the Andes and the lowlands beyond host other worlds; the eastern slope is also the source of the Amazon. Thus, a mere 400 miles due east of its desert coast, Peru culminates in vast and still largely uncharted Amazonian rain forests inhabited by scores of smaller Indian groups.



A conquistador on horse triumphs over his Indian adversary. (from *Guamán Poma*)

The Spaniards were greatly impressed by the Incas' accomplishments. "Few nations had a better government," wrote Pedro Cieza de León, one of the earliest European chroniclers. "One of the things most to be envied . . . is how well they knew how to conquer such vast lands . . . and bring them to the flourishing state in which the Spaniards found them." But the Spaniards wasted little time on admiration. Their goal from the beginning was to harness the Indian population to mine silver, gold, and mercury and to work, along with African slaves, the haciendas and plantations. For the traditional tubers, maize, and fruits of the Andean farm system, the Spanish were determined to substitute their own products: wine, grains, and meat. They used whatever elements of the Andean political, social, and economic superstructure that served their purposes, and unhesitatingly modified or discarded those that did not.

Thus, the Spaniards retained some of the Indian nobility (*kuracas*) to serve as intermediaries between themselves and the Indian peasantry. These Hispanized Indians were gradually assimilated into the imperial system and rewarded by the crown with certain rights and privileges usually accorded only to the Iberian aristocracy: the right to own large landed estates, to wear the garb of a Spanish gentleman, to bear arms, to own horses, and to educate their children at elite schools.

But the Spaniards completely redesigned the Inca *mita* system, transforming a rotational labor tax for the building of roads and other public works into a form of virtual slave labor in the Andean mines. They substituted a new monetary economy for one that was based on the Incaic concept of reciprocity and redistribution. (Goods and services paid as taxes to the Inca state were returned to the communities in the form of gifts and other payments.) And they seized many of the best

lands for themselves, leaving Peru with a legacy of one of the most unequal land-holding arrangements in Latin America. Before General Juan Velasco Alvarado's radical agrarian reform of the early 1970s, 69 percent of Peru's privately held land was made up of parcels of 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres) or more. Velasco's land redistribution program reduced the figure to a still considerable 42 percent.

The Spaniards' exploitation of Peru's rich highland mineral deposits left quite a different legacy. During the 20th century, as world demand for Peru's silver and copper grew, the old mining towns expanded. The conversion of Indian peasants into miners and city dwellers also introduced Hispanic customs and practices. And this, combined with racial mixing, created an ever-growing *mestizo* population that would have vast social and political implications for Peru. Today, only 45 percent of Peru's population is Indian; 37 percent is *mestizo*; 12 percent is white; and 6 percent is black.

Some scholars have argued that the Indians remained passive in the face of their brutal subjugation. But as historian Steve Stern has shown, this is an exaggerated view. To survive, the Indians did have to adapt to Spanish domination, and to postcolonial rule after Peru became independent in 1824. As often as not, however, they found ways of asserting their interests. During the colonial period, for example, Madrid built limited protections for Indians into the legal system, recognizing that collapsing Indian demographics posed a threat to its new empire. But many Indian leaders then shrewdly used the legal system to establish their historic rights to the land.

Litigation did not always suffice, of course, and Andean history is full of desperate Indian peasant uprisings. The first revolt occurred in 1536, only a few years after

Pizarro's takeover. Manco Capac, the puppet emperor whom Pizarro installed on the Inca throne, turned against the Spaniards and laid siege to Cuzco and other cities. The Spaniards and their Indian allies held out, and Manco Capac retreated into the remote mountains northwest of Cuzco, where he established a new Inca state at Vilcabamba. It was not until 1572 that the Spanish finally captured and beheaded his successor, Túpac Amaru, ostensibly the last Inca emperor. Yet the myth of Inkarrí, a leader who would rise to avenge the conquest, soon took root throughout the old empire, inspiring many peasant rebellions over the centuries.*

Almost from the earliest colonial times, Indian rebellions have been tangled up with power struggles among the rulers. This was the case, for example, during the great outbreak of Indian rebellions in the Andes throughout the 18th century. The rebel leaders were, in the main, Hispanized Indian *kuracas*, most notably José Gabriel Condorcanqui, a direct descendent of the Inca royal family. In 1780, angered by the Spaniards' endless brutality, he took the name Túpac Amaru II and raised an army of more than 100,000 peasants to fight the colonial authorities. Before his defeat in 1781—he was publicly drawn and quartered in the main square of Cuzco as a warning to other rebels—his movement had attracted dissident *mestizos* and even creoles. The dream of Inca revival corresponded with their desire for independence from the despised Spanish overlords.

A century later, a similar Indian uprising

*One version of the story was recorded by a Peruvian anthropologist in Ayacucho in 1981: "Inkarrí was born to a savage woman but begotten by the Sun. Having grown up, he shut up the wind and tied his father the Sun. He did so to make the time and the day last longer so that he could do what he wanted. He then founded the city of Cuzco. But the Spanish 'Inca' seized the Inkarrí, his equal, and nobody knows where he put him. People say that only his cut-off head is left but that it is growing from inside, growing towards his feet. Once his body has become complete, Inkarrí will return."



A School for Terrorism. Members of the Shining Path lecture recruits at a training camp in the coca-growing highland jungle.

occurred in the northern Peruvian highlands, led by a respected Indian *kuraca* named Atusparia. In 1885, he allied himself with the popular *caudillo* (military leader) Andres Cáceres. A creole and a hero of the popular resistance to the Chilean occupation during the War of the Pacific (1879–84), Cáceres hoped that the Indians who had helped fight the Chileans would now help him overthrow Peru's government. But Atusparia's rebellion was brutally crushed that year. Cáceres, on the other hand, was elected to Peru's presidency in 1886.

Seeking support of the Indian masses, Sendero leaders today are not so very different from those creole rebels of the past. They are mainly university-educated *mestizos* of the urban middle and lower-middle class, with relatively recent ties to the countryside and an Indian past. They seek to harness the grievances of the Indian proletariat and dispossessed peasants to their own political agenda. Yet their appeal is especially strong on university campuses throughout the country, particularly among students of similar background who see little hope of economic security in the future.

Sendero founder Guzmán obtained a

doctorate in philosophy in 1960 from the University of San Agustín in his native Arequipa, Peru's second largest city. After graduation, he joined the Education Program at the venerable National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho. In 1988, in his only published interview, Guzmán declared that these years in Ayacucho "served to open my eyes to the [plight] of the [Andean] peasantry." The young, charismatic Guzmán preached a mixture of Marxist-Lenin-

ism, Maoism, and the ideas of José Carlos Mariátegui, an ardent early nationalist and Indianist who founded the highly influential journal *Amauta* and the Peruvian Communist Party. (It is from Mariátegui's writings that Guzmán took the name Shining Path for his party.) Guzmán saw Peru, as Mao had seen China, as a semi-feudal country ruled solely for the benefit of a tiny elite.

In 1980, emulating Mao's successful strategy, Guzmán launched the revolution's second stage: armed struggle. Ultimately, his goal is to take over the countryside, then encircle and invade the cities.

It has been said that Guzmán's emphasis on Peru's semi-feudal character and his comparisons with pre-revolutionary China are obsolete. Peru, critics point out, is no longer an agrarian peasant society but a predominantly urban and industrializing one. They are right, of course, except in failing to point out that Peru is also now fast becoming a *mestizo* country. And the *mestizos*, who once denied their Indian past in order to fit a more Hispanized notion of Peruvian identity, are increasingly disposed to embrace it. Historian Jorge Basadre calls

this "the most fundamental event in 20th-century Peruvian life: the growth and enrichment of the image of the Indian."

This change took political shape during General Juan Velasco Alvarado's populist military regime of 1968-75. Velasco, himself a *mestizo*, made Túpac Amaru II, the 18th-century rebel Indian nobleman, a symbol of national identity. Inaugurating his land reform program in 1969, Velasco quoted the rebel's vow, "Peasant, the landlord will eat no more from your poverty!" (More recently, the name has been appropriated by a small Cuban-oriented guerrilla movement in Peru, which calls itself Túpac Amaru.) He elevated Quechua, the tongue of a third of Peru's people, to the status of an official language, equal to Spanish. By pushing through agrarian and other reforms, he sought to bridge the old Andean dualism. "For the first time," recalls Peruvian sociologist José Alvarado, "nonwhites began to feel Peruvian."

In practice, however, Velasco's reforms did much more for the coast than for the impoverished highlands. And all hope for improvement seemed gone after Velasco was overthrown in 1975 by more conservative officers. Ayacucho proved to be fertile ground for Guzmán's efforts.

But while Sendero has capitalized on the Indian question, its larger message is aimed at the increasingly impoverished

THE OTHER PERU

In 1983, eight Lima journalists were killed by Andean Indians who mistook them for Sendero guerrillas. Mario Vargas Llosa, investigating the massacre, learned about a very different Peru from the one he knew.

When our commission's hearing in Uchuraccay was over, and, overwhelmed by what we had seen and heard—the graves of the reporters were still open—we were getting ready to return to Ayacucho, a tiny woman from the community suddenly began to dance. She was quietly singing a song whose words we could not understand. She was an Indian as tiny as a child, but she had the wrinkled face of a very old woman, and the scarred cheeks and swollen lips of those who live exposed to the cold of the uplands. She was barefoot, and wore several brightly colored skirts and a hat with ribbons, and as she sang and danced she tapped us gently on the legs with brambles. Was she saying goodbye to us in an ancient ritual? Was she cursing us because we belonged to the strangers—Senderistas, "reporters," *sinchis*—who had brought new reasons for anguish and fear to their lives? Was she exorcising us?

For several weeks, I had been living in a state of extraordinary tension as I interviewed soldiers, politicians, policemen, peasants, and reporters and reviewed dispatches, evidence and legal testimony, trying to establish what had happened. At night, I would often stay awake, attempting to determine the truth of the testimony and the hypotheses, or I had nightmares in which the certainties of the day became enigmas again. And as the story of the eight journalists unfolded—I had known two of them, and had been with Amador García just two days before his trip to Ayacucho—it seemed that another, even more terrible story about my own country was being revealed. But at no time had I felt as much sorrow as in Uchuraccay on that late afternoon, with its threatening clouds, watching the tiny woman who danced and tapped us with brambles, and who seemed to come from a Peru different from the one I live in, an ancient, archaic Peru that has survived in these sacred mountains despite centuries of isolation and adversity.

mestizo underclass of Lima and the other cities. During the past two decades the great *desborde popular* (overflowing of the masses), as the anthropologist José Matos Mar calls it, has radically redrawn the ethnic and social map of the country. Even as the Indian majority gradually gives way to a new *mestizo* one, Peru's towns and cities, particularly Lima, are becoming increasingly "Indianized" as more and more migrants arrive from the Andes.

In this sense, there is no longer any real Indian question. The great divide between creoles and Indians, reinforced for centuries by the distinctions between town and country and between coast and highland, is disappearing. Out of this social upheaval, Peru is forging a new identity. Some of its outlines can perhaps be discerned in the enormous growth in recent years of the so-called "informal" or illegal sector of the economy. As economist Hernando de Soto wrote in 1986 in *El Otro Sendero (The Other Path)*, a best seller in Latin America, the explosion of the informal sector is a response to creole efforts to keep the peasants from the cities. "Quite simply," he writes, "Peru's legal institutions had been developed over the years to meet the needs and bolster the privileges of certain dominant groups in the cities and to isolate the peasants geographically in rural areas."

The creole elite made it next to impossible for newcomers legally to build a home, get a job, or start a business. There was even a proposal in the national legislature during the 1940s to require visitors from the countryside to obtain a passport before entering Lima. As a result, de Soto estimates, half of Lima's citizens live in informal housing and half of the country's population is employed in the informal sector. Informal organizations now build roads, sewage systems, and marketplaces; they provide 80 percent of the mass transit service in the capital city. "The real remedy for violence and poverty," de Soto argues, "is to recognize the property and labor of those whom formality today excludes."

Both the informal sector and the issue of race played an important role in the presidential elections of 1990. The New Right, led by Vargas Llosa, used de Soto's ideas as the basis for an alliance with small-scale "underground" entrepreneurs. He

hoped to win support with his plan to deregulate the economy and move Peru closer to true free-market capitalism.

But most of the "*informales*" were also part of the economically disenfranchised Indian and *mestizo* populations who had earlier benefited from Velasco's reforms (including consumer subsidies and import restrictions) and from his effort to forge a more inclusive national identity. In a country so historically polarized by the Indian question, it was soon widely perceived that Vargas Llosa—with his privileged background, his international success, and his ties to the old families—represented the same "white" creole elites that had dominated the country in the past.

Hence the stunning rise of Alberto Fujimori, the second-generation Japanese-Peruvian "rocket" who came from nowhere to challenge Vargas Llosa in the closing weeks of the first-round election. Like Vargas Llosa, Fujimori played to the *informales*. But his vague, center-left program emphasized gradualness, a safer path to economic reform, he argued, than Vargas Llosa's "shock" therapy. Further distinguishing himself from Vargas Llosa, Fujimori made sure that middle-class *mestizos* were prominent members of his entourage: When he announced his candidacy on television, his two *mestizo* vice presidential running mates stood conspicuously at his side. Voters did not miss the message.

The presidential race thus revived the oldest conflicts of Peruvian history. But the victory of Fujimori in the June 10 run-off could become a minor historical footnote if he does nothing to address the legacies of the conquest. It would be a bitter irony indeed if the ultimate winner of Peru's most recent election turned out to be Sendero Luminoso.

BRAZIL'S SIGNIFICANT MINORITY

by David Maybury-Lewis

The Indians of Brazil have been much in the news lately. In the summer of 1988, Kayapo from the northern state of Pará sat for several weeks in the antechambers of parliament while delegates drafted the new constitution of Brazil. They were there, in tribal paint and feathers, to urge the delegates to guarantee Indian rights. In March 1989, the same Kayapo Indians played host to a week-long Indian summit meeting at Altamira in the heart of the Amazon to protest the building of dams that would flood their lands. The meeting was packed with other Indians, their supporters, and the international press. Partly because of the Kayapo's efforts, the World Bank and several foreign commercial banks withdrew their support for the dam-building project.

More recent subjects of media attention have been the Yanomamo, an indigenous people who live along Brazil's border with Venezuela. Thanks to the new roads and airstrips that have been built in the area as part of Brazil's extensive Northern Headwaters project, launched in 1985, more than 45,000 gold miners have poured into Yanomamo territory, driving some Indians out of their villages

and destroying their homes. The miners have polluted the rivers, driven away game, and brought disease and starvation to the Yanomamo. The rising death toll—about 10 percent of the 10,000 Yanomamo have perished during the last two years—has stirred angry protests both in Brazil and abroad. In October 1989, a federal court in Brasília confirmed the rights of the Yanomamo to all of their traditional territory, and it called on the federal government to remove the miners from Yanomamo land. The government dragged its feet, pleading that it had no power to enforce the ruling. Recently, Brazil's new president, Fernando Collor de Mello, ordered the destruction of 100 dirt airstrips to restrict access to the region, but the order has not yet been carried out. At the same time, he pledged to balance the Indians' needs with those of non-Indians. It remains to be seen how this balancing act will be accomplished.



Assembled outside the Brazilian Congress last September, Indians from 76 tribes protested unregulated mining on Yanomamo territory.

It is surprising in some ways that the Indian question has become such a sensitive political issue in Brazil—indeed, one that authorities now treat as a matter of national security. Brazil's estimated 250,000 Indians make up less than one percent of the nation's population. They are scattered throughout the more

remote regions of a country that is larger than the United States (minus Alaska) and noted for its impenetrable jungles and vast wilderness. The sensitivity is all the more puzzling in light of the marginal role that Indians have played throughout Brazilian history. Even when the first Portuguese explorers arrived in 1500, they found none of the large settled populations that their Spanish counterparts came across—and quickly subjugated—in Central America and the Andes.

The Portuguese were in fact relatively slow to colonize their South American territory. Portugal, unlike Britain, had no large surplus population to send to the New World. (During the 16th century, it had only one million inhabitants.) Moreover, Vasco da Gama had recently discovered the sea route to the East Indies around the Cape of Good Hope, and the Portuguese were intent on exploiting their empire in Africa and Asia, where they dominated the trade in low-volume, luxury commodities such as silks, ivory, and spices. Brazil's sparsely populated jungles offered no similar prizes, no obvious opportunities for rapid enrichment. Indeed, it was only by accident that, in 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral landed in Brazil and claimed it for Portugal; he had been bound for the Orient when a storm blew him off course.

In addition to seeming a relatively unattractive colony, Brazil was difficult for the Portuguese to hold onto, even though the Indians received the settlers peaceably enough at first. In return for metal tools, the natives cut and supplied the hardwood logs of reddish brazilwood from which the colony took its name. But Indian wars soon erupted, and by the middle of the 16th century, the Portuguese were fighting to de-

fend their settlements not only against the Indians but also against rival Europeans, particularly the French and the Dutch. (The French and the Portuguese struggled for close to 150 years for control of Guanabara Bay, across whose waters the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Niterói now stand.)

In Brazil, as elsewhere in the New World, the Europeans enlisted Indians as allies, enslaving them when their help was no longer needed. The Indians, of course, fought hard to avoid slavery, and when they were defeated, as they invariably were, they tried to withdraw into the wilderness. But not even their remoteness could fully protect them. By the 17th century, as the demand for labor on the coastal sugar plantations grew, the Portuguese had become accomplished slavers. Their expeditions, called *bandeiras* (from the word meaning flag, or a detachment of armed men), penetrated the most inhospitable regions in search of Indians. The poorer colonists, especially those from São Paulo in the south, became notorious *bandeirantes*, who embarked on grueling slaving expeditions that lasted as long as four years. "These Portuguese do and suffer incomparably more to win the bodies of the Indians for their service than I do to win their souls for heaven," a Spanish Jesuit remarked.

The Portuguese kings of the 17th century displayed considerable ambivalence about the enslavement of Indians. At times, they were persuaded that it would be wiser to educate them into being loyal subjects of the crown. Such a policy, they believed, would help solve the problem of holding and peopling the vast territories. And as the Jesuits constantly reminded the kings, it would also be the Christian thing to do.

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Father Antônio Vieira was the most vigorous 17th-century champion of the Jesuit strategy. His role was similar to that of the more famous Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Spanish priest who had become Bishop of the Indies a century earlier. Vieira could also be as inconsistent as Las Casas, who campaigned against the enslavement of Indians while condoning that of blacks. Vieira, for his part, fulminated against Indian slavery, even as he dispatched missionaries to accompany official slaving expeditions. And he continued to lure Indians into mission villages long after he knew that doing so made them easy prey for slave-hunters. Both Las Casas and Vieira were caught in the same dilemma, one that neither the Spanish nor the Portuguese monarchs could solve: Christian concern for the rights of the Indians ran counter to the interests of the colonists. No one, not even the kings of Spain or Portugal, was powerful enough to force his far-flung subjects to abandon slavery.

Thus, even the Marquis of Pombal, Portugal's virtual dictator for many years under King José I (1750–77), was unable to prevail when he appointed his own step-brother governor of Maranhão in northern Brazil in 1751. The new governor arrived with orders to enforce a 1748 ban on slavery, but before long he was making the same arguments that the colonists had always made. The Jesuits, he said, were abusing their power over the Indians. "They started with general virtue and religious zeal," he wrote, "but have ended in the abominable vice of avarice." Pombal, who had his own quarrel with the Church at home, finally found it more convenient to



Portuguese bandeirantes (expeditionaries) of the 17th century went into the jungles of Brazil to enslave Indians. Here, a group of bandeirantes meets stiff resistance from Botocudo warriors.

expel the Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies in 1759 than to persist in the effort to abolish slavery. By then a system of forced labor had replaced outright slavery, leaving the Indians no better off.

At the end of the 18th century, Indians were, in any case, increasingly irrelevant to the life of the colony. For one thing, very few survived. Compared with roughly two-and-a-half million Indians at the beginning of the colonial period,* there remained only about 100,000 at the time Brazil gained its independence from Portugal in 1822—a small proportion of the country's two million population. In addition to their decimation by disease, maltreatment, and warfare, Indians had been replaced by blacks as the major source of labor. Hundreds of thousands of African slaves toiled variously on the sugar plantations of northeastern Brazil (supporting an economy that resembled that of the antebellum Deep South in the United States), in the gold mines of central Brazil, and, later, on the

*Precise calculations are impossible, but estimates range from four or five million at the time of the Portuguese arrival to less than one million. John Hemming's figure of two-and-a-half million, cited in *Red Gold* (1978), seems a reasonable, middle-range estimate.



*Cândido M. Rondon (1865–1958),
first head of Brazil's Indian Service.*

coffee plantations farther south.

By this time, those Indians who remained could be found only in remote regions or on the frontiers of settlement. Fortunately for these survivors, there was no expansionary push westward, such as took place during the 19th century in the United States. In Brazil, the non-Indian population clung mainly to the coastal regions, communicating by sea or by means of a few great rivers: the Amazon, the São Francisco, or the Paraná. All of the capitals of the major states, save one (Belo Horizonte in Minas Gerais), were port cities. Most 19th-century explorations into the heart of the country were undertaken by European scientists, including Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace. Brazilians turned their backs on the interior, leaving the Indians in relative peace.

But not for long. The Indian question became a national issue once again in the early 20th century, when German immigrants who were beginning to open up new farmland in the southern states of Paraná and Santa Catarina came into conflict with Indians who claimed the land as their own.

These skirmishes attracted international attention when Czech anthropologist Vojtěch Frič, who had collected artifacts in the area for the Berlin and Hamburg museums, addressed the 1908 meeting of the International Congress of Americanists in Vienna. He reported that colonists in Brazil were hiring *bugreiros* (Indian killers) to rid the land of natives. Frič described these *bugreiros* as "human hyenas" who attacked Indian villages by night and slaughtered their inhabitants. His revelations were extremely embarrassing to the government of President Afonso Pena, which was trying to recruit immigrants and didn't want prospective settlers from Germany to think they might be moving to a savage frontier.

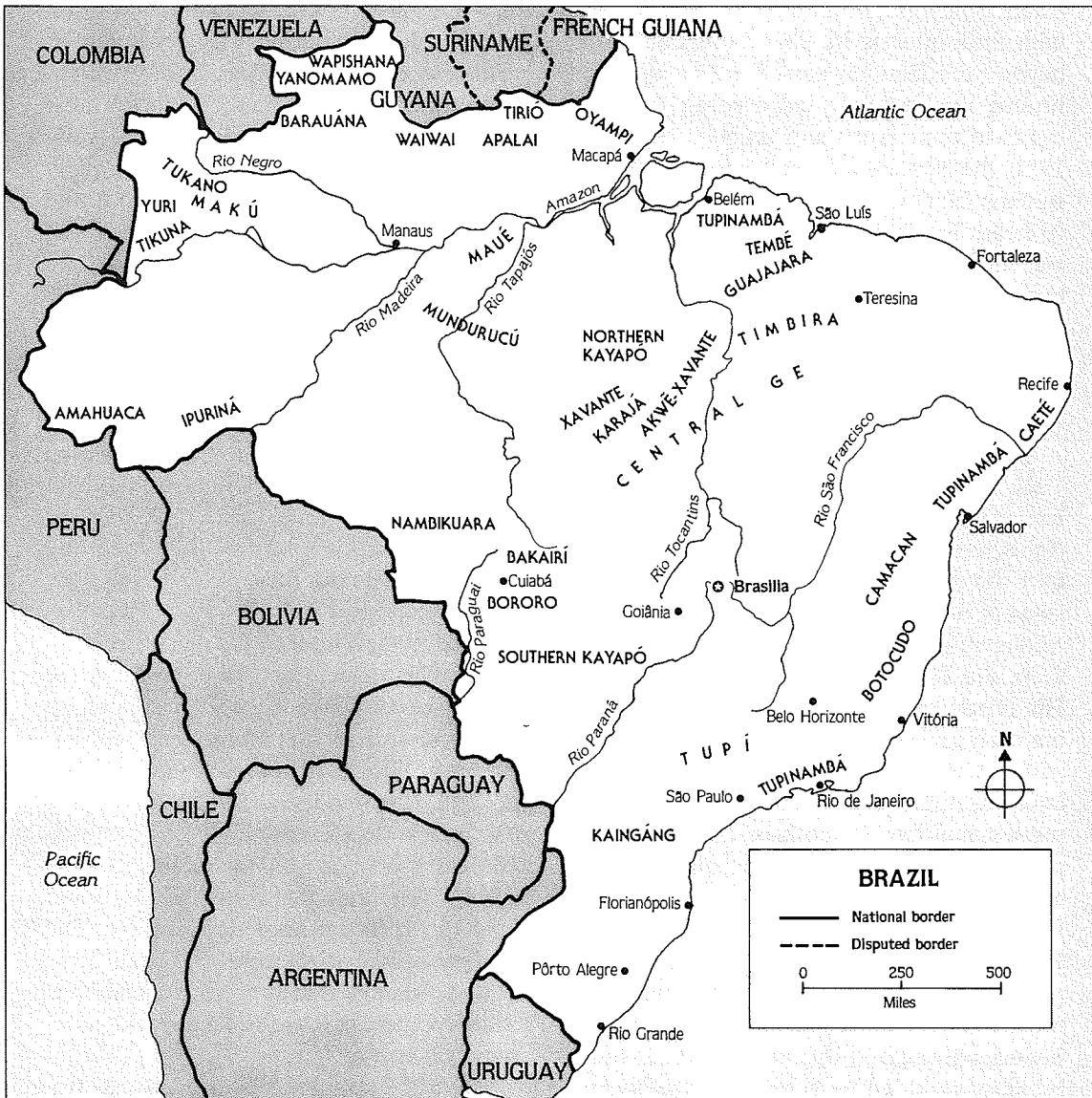
The issue quickly became a matter of national debate. Professor Hermann von Ihering, a German-Brazilian scientist who headed the prestigious Paulista Museum in the city of São Paulo, defended the settlers. They were the vanguard of civilization, he argued, and the Indians would have to give way before them. The Indian cause was taken up by a young army officer and engineer named Cândido Mariano Rondon.

Of partly Indian descent, Rondon was a religious positivist who followed the scientific creed of Auguste Comte and believed in the brotherhood of man. During the 1890s, while laying telegraph lines in the central states of Goiás and Mato Grosso, Rondon had gone out of his way to befriend the Indians. Because of the success of his missions and of his efforts to make peace with the redoubtable Bororo Indians, Colonel Rondon was given command of a major project in 1906. He and his men were to lay a telegraph line across Mato Grosso and a huge, unexplored area of Amazonian jungle (now called Rondonia) to the frontiers of Peru and Bolivia. One night, after having been shot at several times by Nambikuara Indians who re-

mained invisible in the forest—the colonel's carbine and saddle, hit by several arrows, are now museum pieces—Rondon gave his nervous men a famous order that later became the motto of Brazil's Indian Service: "Die, if need be, but never kill." Fortunately, Rondon and his men did not

die; nor did they kill. Their expedition was a success, and Rondon returned to Rio de Janeiro a hero.

Rondon's triumph lent credence to his view that Indians, if treated fairly, could be made into useful citizens. His arguments were taken up by intellectuals in Rio, then



The approximately 250,000 Indians of Brazil make up less than one percent of the nation's total population. There are about 180 indigenous tribes, some of which are located above.

the nation's capital, as well as by scientists at the National Museum. The racist severity of the policy advocated by von Ihering and the Europeans stood in marked contrast to what Brazilians proudly considered their own more characteristic kindness and willingness to compromise. Educated opinion rallied to Rondon's side. In 1910, the Brazilian legislature, dominated by landowners with little interest in what happened at or beyond the frontier, passed extraordinarily liberal legislation guaranteeing Indians rights to their lands and their customs. In 1911, the Service for the Protection of the Indians (SPI) was created, with Rondon as its head. Predictably underfunded, the SPI was unable to protect all of Brazil's Indians, but this was not a great problem at first: The Indians' remoteness was still their best protection.

The creation of the SPI seemed to be a popular vindication of Rondon's principles—that Indians were not irremediably savage, that they had certain rights which should be protected, and that they should be helped to become useful citizens of the republic. But in fact, most Brazilians still thought like von Ihering. Why, then, did Rondon's views prevail in 1910? His charisma was not the only reason. In the early 20th century, many educated Brazilians were embarrassed by their nation's backwardness and by the central government's inability to control the rural oligarchs. They were eager for modernization and a stronger, more united nation. Rondon's notion of nation-building was both modern and Brazilian. The SPI, a federal agency, would help bring even the most remote inhabitants of Brazil into the nation, although at this early stage, nation-building included no expansionist schemes for the settlement and development of the western regions.

That changed. Getúlio Vargas, an oli-

garch from the cattle-ranching plains in Brazil's far south, seized control of the government in 1930 and set about creating a more powerful central government, enacting a wide range of social legislation, and encouraging new industries and agricultural diversity. One part of Vargas's modernization program was the opening up of the west, but he did not pursue it very energetically. It didn't matter. A spontaneous westward movement was already underway, building momentum during the next 30 years. This movement received a strong boost in 1960, when the nation's capital was transferred from Rio de Janeiro to the new city of Brasília, in the sparsely populated highlands of central Brazil. The controversial new capital was established by President Juscelino Kubitschek, himself a native of Minas Gerais, Brazil's only major inland state. Kubitschek hoped that the capital would help open up the interior, and it did. Brasília was soon connected by good roads to the coast and also to Belém at the mouth of the Amazon. For the first time in the nation's history, the north, the center, and the southeast were linked by easy overland routes.

When the military seized power in 1964, it stepped up road construction, intending to move beyond central Brazil and open up the far west and the Amazonian regions. The uninhibited development programs pushed by the generals during their 20-year rule had a disastrous effect on the Indians—so disastrous that Brazil suddenly found itself facing charges of genocide from the international community. The Brazilian authorities were shocked. How could a country that protected its Indians in the tradition of Rondon be thought guilty of such a crime?

The SPI found itself in a dilemma. If it tried to defend the rights of the Indians, it would be accused of impeding development in the form of cattle ranching, log-

ging, agribusiness, and mining. The views of the military government were made quite clear. Rangel Reis, the minister of the interior, went so far as to say that cattle were the *bandeirantes* of the 1970s. Meanwhile, the government's development strategies stimulated a growing hunger for land throughout Brazil. The landless poor started to flock to the frontiers, and Indians soon found themselves facing outsiders who wanted either to uproot them or to exterminate them.

The government was certainly never in favor of killing Indians, but it took no steps to protect them from the predictable effects of unbridled frontier expansion. The SPI, caught in the middle, was at best ineffectual. At worst, it was complicitous. Increasingly, it tried to instill an entrepreneurial spirit in its posts, using Indian labor or the natural resources on Indian lands to make a profit for the Service (or for individual members of it). Some of its officials accepted bribes or were persuaded to conspire with the invading frontiersmen.

When these scandals were revealed in 1967, the government dissolved the service that Rondon had created and replaced it with the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). None of the guilty agents of the old service served time in jail, however, and FUNAI soon faced the same dilemma that its predecessor had.

In 1975, Interior Minister Reis launched a campaign for the "emancipation" of the Indians, presenting it as the equivalent of black emancipation. But the emancipation of the blacks came about with the abolition



A Franciscan missionary supervising the work of Indians. The engraving is by João Maurício Rugendas, who travelled throughout Brazil during the early 19th century.

of slavery in 1888. The Indians, nearly a century later, were not slaves. So what, Indians began to wonder, were they being emancipated from?

It was soon clear that the government intended to free them from the tutelage of FUNAI and indeed from their very identity as Indians. FUNAI was urged to "civilize" the Indians as quickly as possible so that they would no longer have any reason to claim special protection (and so that FUNAI itself could go out of business). But the Indians were not interested in this kind of rapid assimilation. They were fighting for their lives in some parts of Brazil (along the route of Rondon's first expedition to the northwest, for example, as well as in the Amazonian regions); and everywhere they were struggling for their land and customs. They pointed out that their rights were guaranteed under Brazilian law and that FUNAI was supposed to protect them. In December 1978, Indian representatives from 13 tribes in seven states wrote to President (and General) Ernesto Geisel:

We are not impressed by the pronouncements made in the press by the minister of the interior or the president of FUNAI in defense of emancipation. Only we, as victims of that policy, can make an honest appraisal of what this emancipation means. If fine speech could solve our problems, we would not be in a situation today so distant from what the Indian Statute was to have protected. We say the emancipation sought by the minister of the interior will cause the detribalization of indigenous communities, and consequently will destroy them individually and collectively. For the Indian must live in his own communities, with full liberty of cultural tradition and freedom to possess the land.

The government's policies also aroused opposition among non-Indians. The Indians, scattered as they were, started to organize in their own defense; deputations of chiefs were frequently seen in Brasília, coming to put their case directly to the authorities. They were supported by the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI), an arm of the Catholic Church, by pro-Indian organizations largely started by anthropologists, and by the National Association for the Support of the Indians, whose chapters started springing up in major cities, including Pôrto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. The plight of the Indians soon attracted international attention. In 1979, a World Bank report noted the Indians' "increasingly precarious position"; its observation that "diseases transmitted by the new settlers have decimated whole tribes" was not the only one that seemed to echo back over four centuries of history.

The pro-Indian movement gathered momentum during the period known as the *abertura* (opening), which began in 1977 when Geisel announced his intention to return the country gradually to civilian rule. In the Brazilian press, discussion of the pressure on Indians became a kind of pretext, or cover, for discussing the military's development program, which had placed

such a severe burden on the poor, especially those in rural areas.

In 1985, when the civilian administration of President José Sarney took over from the military, the need to veil debates disappeared, but the Indian question did not. To the contrary, it became the subject of even stormier debate, largely because the Indians and their demands highlight many of the unresolved issues in modern Brazilian politics.

This was made abundantly clear in an unusual series of articles carried for a full week in 1987 on the front page of Brazil's major newspaper, the *Estado de São Paulo*. The articles appeared while delegates were meeting in Brasília to draft a new constitution. Collectively titled "The Conspiracy against Brazil," they were intended to discourage delegates from heeding the demands of pro-Indian groups. These groups wanted the constitution to declare Brazil a multi-ethnic nation, with Indian lands and customs guaranteed. Their opponents argued that Brazil was a melting pot, a society that welcomed people from other cultures, *provided that they were willing to assimilate into the mainstream*.

The articles in the *Estado* alleged that the pro-Indian advocates were conspiring against Brazil while pretending to defend the rights of indigenous peoples. They were guilty on three counts: First, by calling for a multi-ethnic Brazil, the pro-Indian groups were dividing the nation. Second, they were in league with foreign churches in an effort to internationalize the Amazon. And third, they were working covertly with foreign mining companies, for if they succeeded in preventing Brazilian mining companies from exploiting minerals on Indian lands, Brazil would be forced to buy minerals from abroad. Outraged, the Catholic Church took legal action against the *Estado* and showed that its allegations were

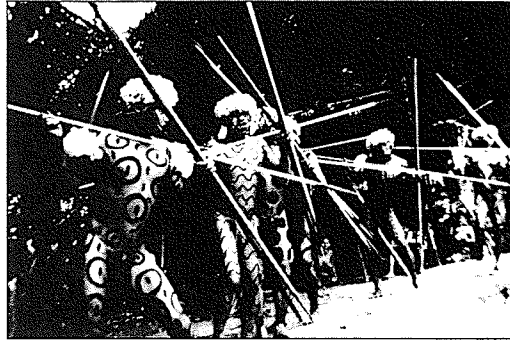
based on reports that were partially or misleadingly quoted, and in some cases actually forged. Nonetheless, the campaign of vilification put the proponents of Indian rights on the defensive.

In May 1988, the constitutional convention voted not to declare Brazil a multi-ethnic society. It also refused to provide Indian lands with protection against mining interests, although it did limit the circumstances under which these lands could be mined. At the same time, somewhat contradictorily, the rights of Indians to their lands and customs were written into the constitution, and FUNAI's "emancipation" policy was excluded.

As a result of these decisions, Brazil's Indians find themselves in a curious state of constitutional limbo. Their right to their customs is guaranteed, but it is unclear how they are to maintain their way of life in a nation which officially insists that it is a melting pot. Moreover, the partial constitutional victories for the Indian cause have done little to mitigate the violence that continues to be done to them.

Brazilian schoolbooks glorify the *bandeirantes* who built the nation, glossing over their slaving activities by asserting that the work of Indians (and later of blacks) was necessary for the economy of the colony. Similarly, elimination of the Indians in more recent times is justified in the name of civilization. The official policy of successive administrations, both military and civilian, is that assimilation is the Brazilian way. Furthermore, so this official rationalization goes, Indians who cling to their own way of life "stand in the way of development."

To be sure, the last justification depends on a very narrow definition of development. Protected Indian lands do get in the way of land grabbers and speculators, of rapacious mining interests, and of ranchers who wish to turn vast tracts of territory into



Yanomamo Indians, a Stone Age people, parade with their spears during a tribal feast.

grazing lands. These are precisely the people who have been assisted in Brazil by government subsidies and by the government's willingness to look the other way when they do violence to Indians and to the rural poor. But this is neither the only nor the best way to pursue development. Other possible strategies would encourage or at least accommodate people such as rubber-tappers, smallholders, and indigenous producers. Indians throughout the Americas have shown that they can adapt to market forces and still maintain their own cultures, as, for example, the Hopi have done in the United States and the Xavante and the Kayapo are doing in Brazil. The latter are now beginning to market fruits and other forest products that they have grown on their own lands. The Indians' way of doing things may even suggest better local strategies for economic development than those that have been so disastrously followed in recent decades. Scientists have only recently begun to discover the true value of agricultural and forestry techniques that the Amazonian Indians have used for centuries. Darrell Posey, an anthropologist who worked among the Kayapo, found that these practices offer "thousands of ways of making the living forest more valuable than the destroyed forest."

The supposed requirements of that "development" in whose name Indians and

others are threatened with impoverishment are, then, merely a fiction. But the powers that be continue to exploit this fiction.

Even though the grandiose development policies pursued for so many years by the military have thrown the nation into an economic and social crisis, Brazil's leaders continue to point to the Amazon and other regions of the far west as the solution. According to their vision, Brazil taps the resources of its hinterland and colonizes the frontier with people drawn from the poverty-stricken masses.

But the reality so far has failed to live up to the dream. The resources have not been as abundant as was hoped, and the process of extracting them has involved continuing violence against the inhabitants and the environment itself. The damage to the Amazonian ecosystem has provoked a worldwide outcry, which in turn has aroused Brazilian nationalism. Brazilians resent being told that the Amazon is a global resource—President Sarney even called this kind of insistence a form of "colonialism." The Brazilian military sees such international concern as a thinly veiled attack on Brazilian sovereignty. It pushed through the Northern Headwaters program in 1985 in order to secure the Amazonian frontiers for Brazil and to encourage settlement.

The military, which retains considerable influence even within the present administration, is not about to let considerations of Indian rights interfere with its grand de-

sign. As a result, important decisions concerning Indian affairs have been taken out of the hands of FUNAI and are now routinely made by the nation's security council. This is justified on the grounds that Indian questions are frontier questions, but that is not the main reason.

Brazil today is engaged in intense national introspection. Its citizens are reflecting on the bitter experiences of the recent past, on the dire present situation, and on the prospects for the future. They are aware that the people have paid a high price for the development that was imposed on them. They resent the fact that they are now being dunned by rich countries to repay huge debts (now totalling \$114.6 billion) that were incurred by dictators over whom they had no control, for money spent on they know not what.

But Brazilians are not just arguing about their economic future. They are rethinking their constitution and their political institutions. Most of all, they are reflecting on what it means to be Brazilian and on what kind of a nation they want theirs to be. At the moment, social justice is high on the list of popular concerns, and while the Indians are not the only ones who suffer, their plight is the most dramatic reminder of how the weak are mistreated. That is why the military and the other powerful supporters of the development policies of the past 25 years consider the Indian question a matter of national security.

THE CONQUEST TRADITION OF CENTRAL AMERICA

by Richard N. Adams

Between 1979 and 1984, the government of Guatemala added a particularly tragic chapter to this century's chronicle of "civilized" brutality. In the name of quelling a leftist insurgency movement in the northern departments of the nation, the successive military regimes of General Lucas García and General Ríos Montt directed a campaign of mass terror against the nation's Indian population—a campaign so bloody that it recalled the worst atrocities of the 16th-century Spanish *conquistadores*. Paramilitary death squads targeted dissenters, real or imagined, while the army destroyed more than 400 villages, in some cases killing all of their inhabitants. Amnesty International described this holocaust as a "government policy of political murder." The death toll ran into the tens of thousands—by some estimates as high as 80,000—while two to four times that number of Indians fled to neighboring Mexico.

At roughly the same time, in nearby Nicaragua, another conflict between a national government and a large Indian population erupted—but with a far different outcome. Shortly after taking power in 1979, the Sandinista *comandantes*

began to cast their eyes upon the coastal lands of eastern Nicaragua as a frontier for development; they regarded the some 80,000 Miskito Indians who inhabited this sweltering lowland as a vast proletariat, long exploited by rapacious foreign "capitalists," beginning with English buccaneers and loggers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Sandinistas assumed that these Indians—a mixed-race people, in fact, thanks to their intermingling with black slaves whom a shipwreck had deposited on the coast in the 1640s—would go along with their plans for land reform and even tolerate relocation when necessary.

The Miskito, however, had other ideas.



Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the first Spaniard to cross the Panamanian isthmus (in 1513), is shown here unleashing his hounds upon a group of hapless Indians.

Prizing their semi-isolation from the rest of the country, they cherished a tradition of relative independence from Managua. Far from embracing the Sandinista cause, the Indians felt threatened by it. Distrust and misunderstanding only intensified as the Miskito question became an issue in the Nicaraguan civil war. During the early and mid-1980s, as many as 20,000 Miskito fled to Honduras. Some joined the anti-Sandinista "contras." But the Sandinistas, rather than launching a bloody crusade, began negotiations with the Miskito and other coastal Indians. By 1989, Managua had granted the Miskito a measure of local autonomy and agreed to guarantee their rights in the national constitution.

To a large extent, of course, these two episodes are bound up with contemporary national politics. One reason Guatemala's generals pursued their anti-guerrilla campaign so aggressively was to rid the northern departments of Indians who might make claims on the oil reserves recently discovered there. The Miskito controversy was aggravated by power struggles within the ruling Sandinista party, specifically by the increasing domination of the junta by the Marxist Daniel Ortega.

But these episodes—and particularly their resolutions—are also rooted in Central American history, in a long tradition of government-Indian relations that first took shape during the 16th century, when the Spanish conquered this narrow strip of the New World. This history alone explains why the conquest tradition survived in one part of Central America while it largely disappeared in the other. It is a story shaped not only by differences among the conquerors and their successors but also by differ-

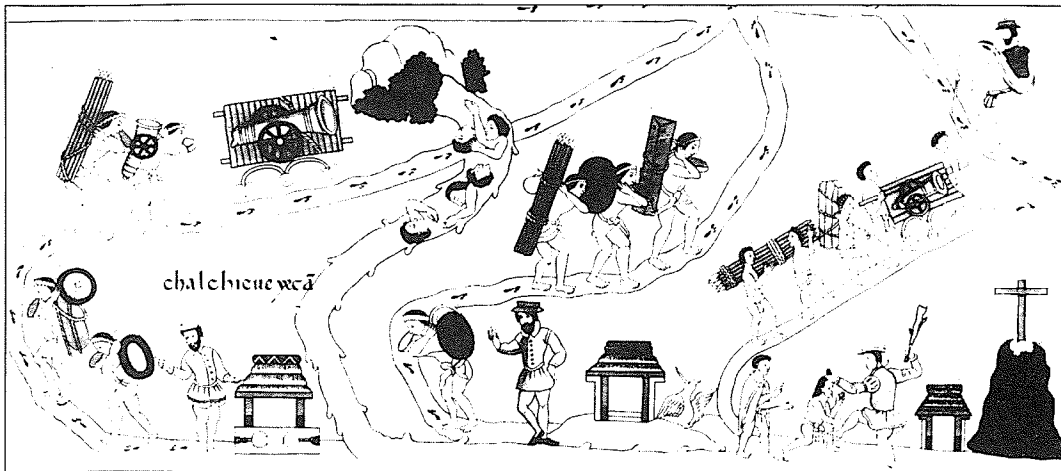
ences between the northern and southeastern Indian cultures.

In the north, the Spanish conquerors who marched down from Mexico encountered a complex assortment of "high cultures," principally the Indian kingdoms of, or related to, the Maya. The land of the "high cultures," called Mesoamerica by archaeologists, extended from central Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula into that part of the upper Central American isthmus that today includes Guatemala, El Salvador, Belize, and western portions of Nicaragua and Honduras.

The societies that flourished here tended to be large, concentrated, and highly organized. Most had clearly delineated social classes—nobles, artisans, merchants, plebes, and slaves—and were run by strong central governments. In addition to creating markets and extensive trade networks, the Maya-related peoples possessed a hieroglyphic form of writing and were highly accomplished in art, astronomy, mathematics, and architecture. Bishop Diego de Landa, an early Spanish missionary, remarked on the "grandeur and the beauty" of Mayan buildings, "for they are so many in number and so are the parts of the country where they are found, and so well built in their fashion that it fills one with astonishment."

But Mesoamerica is only one part of Central America. To the southeast, below an imaginary line that begins at the Península de Nicoya on Costa Rica's uppermost coast and runs northward on a somewhat irregular course to the Atlantic Ocean at Puerto Cortés in Honduras, lie three-fourths of Nicaragua, half of Hondu-

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Indians were forced to serve as human "mules" throughout Spanish-dominated Central America, often transporting goods from ships on one coast to those waiting on the other.

ras, all of Panama, and all but a tiny wedge of northwestern Costa Rica. In this southeastern portion of the isthmus, the Spanish came upon very different kinds of Indian societies—an assortment of tribes, chiefdoms, and confederations.

The societies of the southeastern Indians—including the Cuna, the Guaymí, and the Sumo—were not only smaller* but far less socially evolved than those of the north. Their cultural accomplishments—weaving, basketry, and simple forms of home construction—could not begin to match the achievements of the “high cultures.” Unlike the more sophisticated maize farmers of Mesoamerica, the southeastern Indians subsisted on simple slash-and-burn farming or by hunting, gathering, and fishing. Their diversity and scattered living patterns could not have stood in bolder contrast to the concentrated and highly organized societies of the north.

Of course, the Spanish knew nothing about such differences when they arrived on the threshold of the region in 1501. Settling mainly on the Panamanian coast

around the Gulf of Darién, they had little contact with the people who inhabited the volcano-dotted highlands or the steamier plains and forests of the lowlands. The first serious expedition into the interior was not mounted until 1513, when Vasco Núñez de Balboa made his way across the Panamanian isthmus to the Pacific Ocean and claimed all of its waters, and the shores they lapped, for the Spanish crown.

Six years later, in 1519, Balboa was beheaded for treason and replaced as Spanish commander in Panama by his rival, Pedro Arias de Ávila, known in the New World as Pedrarias Dávila. He led or directed expeditions north into what is now Honduras and Nicaragua, finding gold in the latter and killing all Indians he could not press into service as slaves. His brutality—exceptional even by the standards of his day—is one major reason the Indian populations came close to extinction in the south.

But well before Pedrarias's death in 1531, Hernán Cortés in Mexico heard tales about gold and silver in Honduras. Although still consolidating his conquest of Mexico (1519–21), he sent two expeditions south, one led by Pedro de Alvarado in 1523. A cunning and ruthless commander,

*Scholars estimate that there were up to 13 million Indians in Central America at the beginning of the 16th century, with the greatest populations concentrated in Mesoamerica.

Alvarado came to be as closely identified with the subjugation of Mesoamerica as Pedrarias was with that of the southeast. In 1523, taking advantage of a tribal war in the Guatemalan highlands to enlist Indian allies, he conquered the Maya-related Quiché Indians and shortly thereafter founded the city of Santiago de los Caballeros (now known as Antigua) as his administrative center. He then defeated the Pipiles of El Salvador and marched into Honduras, encountering fierce Indian resistance and, on occasion, Pedrarias's men.

In the north as in the south, the Spanish conquest represented the triumph of the few over the many. Pedro de Alvarado's 420 *conquistadores*, even with Indian allies, were greatly outnumbered in most battles; on one occasion, reputedly, they faced an Indian force of 200,000 men. But for Alvarado, as for other Spaniards, the advantages of muskets, armor, horses, and divide-and-conquer diplomacy proved decisive. "There were so many Indians that they killed," ran a Quiché account of a major battle with Alvarado, "that they made a river of blood; that is why it was given the name of Quiquel [blood], because all the water became blood and also the day became red on account of the great bloodshed that day."

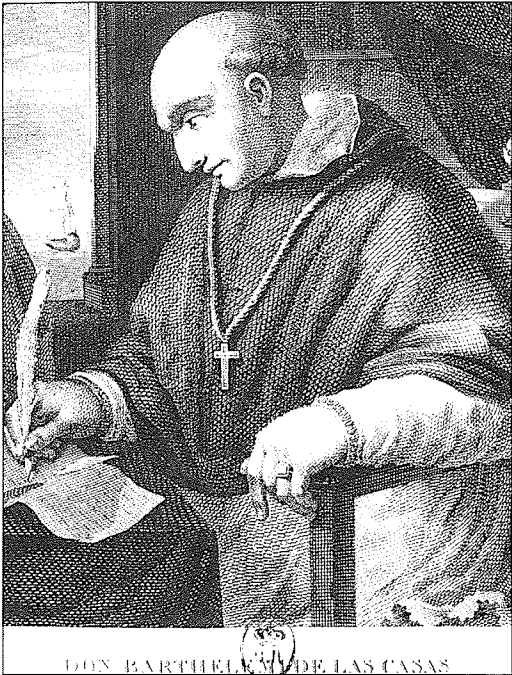
More devastating even than gunpowder, scholars believe, were the white man's diseases. Smallpox, measles, yellow fever, typhus, and a variety of new viruses in some cases marched ahead of the conquering armies, laying waste to native villages before a shot was fired. But muskets and viruses were not the only killers. Forced labor—both physically taxing and psychologically demoralizing—also took its toll. Slavery was particularly hard on the southeastern Indians, who were completely unaccustomed to the rigors of "disciplined" labor. The shock of enslavement—including literal branding under Pedrarias—was se-

vere. Many Indians were uprooted from their villages and sent as far off as Peru to work the Spanish mines. Many succumbed to the alien climates or harsh working conditions. Others met their deaths in Panama transporting Spanish cargo across the isthmus, the overland stage in the shipment of plunder from Peru to Spain. Between 1500 and 1700, the Indian populations of the southeast, smaller than those of Mesoamerica to begin with, fell sharply: by about 93 percent in Panama, 98 percent in Costa Rica, and 95 percent in conquered Nicaragua (compared with about 80 percent in Guatemala).

In Mesoamerica, by contrast, many Indians were already familiar with the conditions of enforced servitude. Slaves and plebes had for centuries served their kings, tilling the fields and building such ceremonial centers as Utatlán and Zaculeu in the Guatemala highlands. (Archaeologists have identified at least 116 such centers, which once boasted great pyramids, palaces, and observatories.) The Spanish, taking advantage of the existing system, simply stepped in as the new lords.

The conquerors of Mesoamerica—models of gentleness none—at least in principle observed certain restrictions that the crown and Cortés had put on slavery: They enslaved only Indian combatants or former Indian slaves. And shortly after Cortés became governor and captain-general of New Spain (Mexico and most of Central America) in 1522, most of his subalterns adopted the medieval Spanish system of labor called the *encomienda* and abandoned outright enslavement.

Under the *encomienda*, a colonist was awarded land and Indian labor in return for his pledge to protect and Christianize his charges. The converted Indians, in turn, were obliged to pay a tribute, part of which went to the crown and part to their *enco-*



DON BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

menderos. The Indians were also expected to provide a certain amount of labor to the colonial leaders. Some worked on the haciendas or on public projects in colonial towns like Santiago de Guatemala or Gracias in Honduras, while others, despite royal ordinances, were forced to labor in mines or serve as human pack-horses. A goodly number of Christianized Indians ended up being resettled in villages, or *pueblos*, where they enjoyed limited self-government. Their leaders, or *caciques*, formed native councils, responsible for internal order, the allocation of work and services, and the collection of tribute. But Spanish civil authorities retained ultimate authority over the tribute system, and all activities remained under the watchful eyes of the missionary priests.

In fact, from the earliest days of the conquest, secular and religious authority were virtually indistinguishable throughout the Spanish empire. When news of Columbus's discovery reached the Spanish court in 1493, Pope Alexander VI gave the Spanish

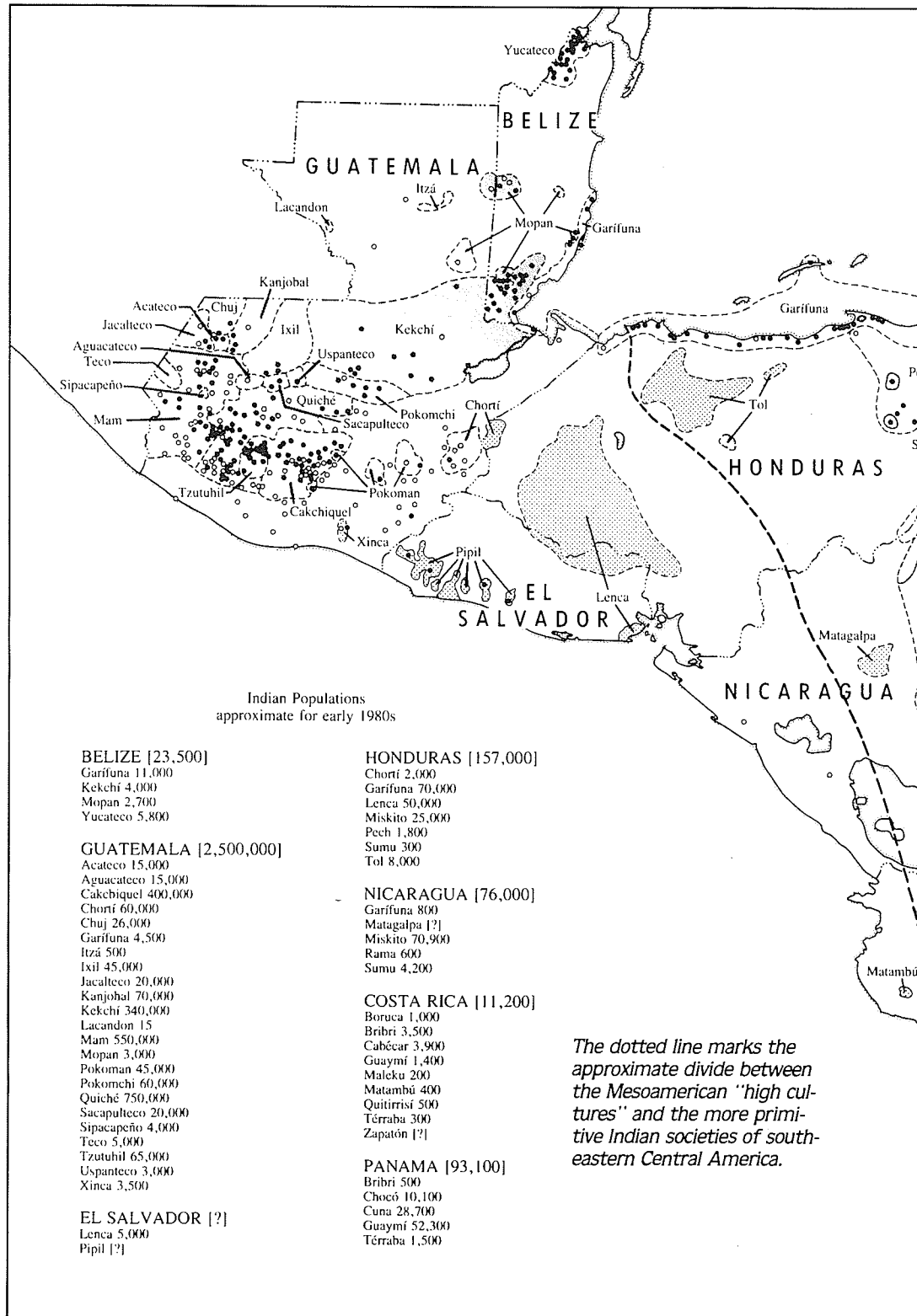
monarchs title to most of the new land*—and, with it, the duty to convert the pagans. But despite the closeness of church and government, the two often disagreed over the treatment of Indians. Dominican and Jesuit missionaries were generally protective of the Indians, viewing them as no different from any other of God's creatures. The Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas traveled throughout Central America, denouncing the Spanish for their mistreatment of the Indians. Local civil authorities, however, and many regular clergy, argued that Indians had no inherent rights, much less civilization; coercive labor, they held, was the best means of Christianizing these less-than-human creatures.

The conflict was partially resolved in 1542, when Charles I (1519–56) issued the New Laws and sent a forceful administrator, Alonso López de Cerrato, to Santiago to enforce them. Intended to protect Indians from the worst abuses of coercive labor, the laws forbade outright slavery, eliminated many of the *encomiendas*, and placed Indians under the direct jurisdiction of the crown. But the crown did not abolish the tribute obligations of the Christianized Indians, which remained a mainstay of the colonial economy until 1811.

Even as their treatment was regularized, the Indians continued to decline in numbers. Throughout Central America, but particularly in the southeast, miscegenation hastened the disappearance of pure-blooded Indians. Out of this other "conquest" came mixed-blood *mestizos*, or *ladinos*, who by the 17th century formed a distinct class of wage laborers, small farmers, artisans, merchants, and peddlers. With time, of course, *ladinos* came to disdain the poor, pure-blooded Indians as much as the pure-blooded creoles disdained the *ladinos*.

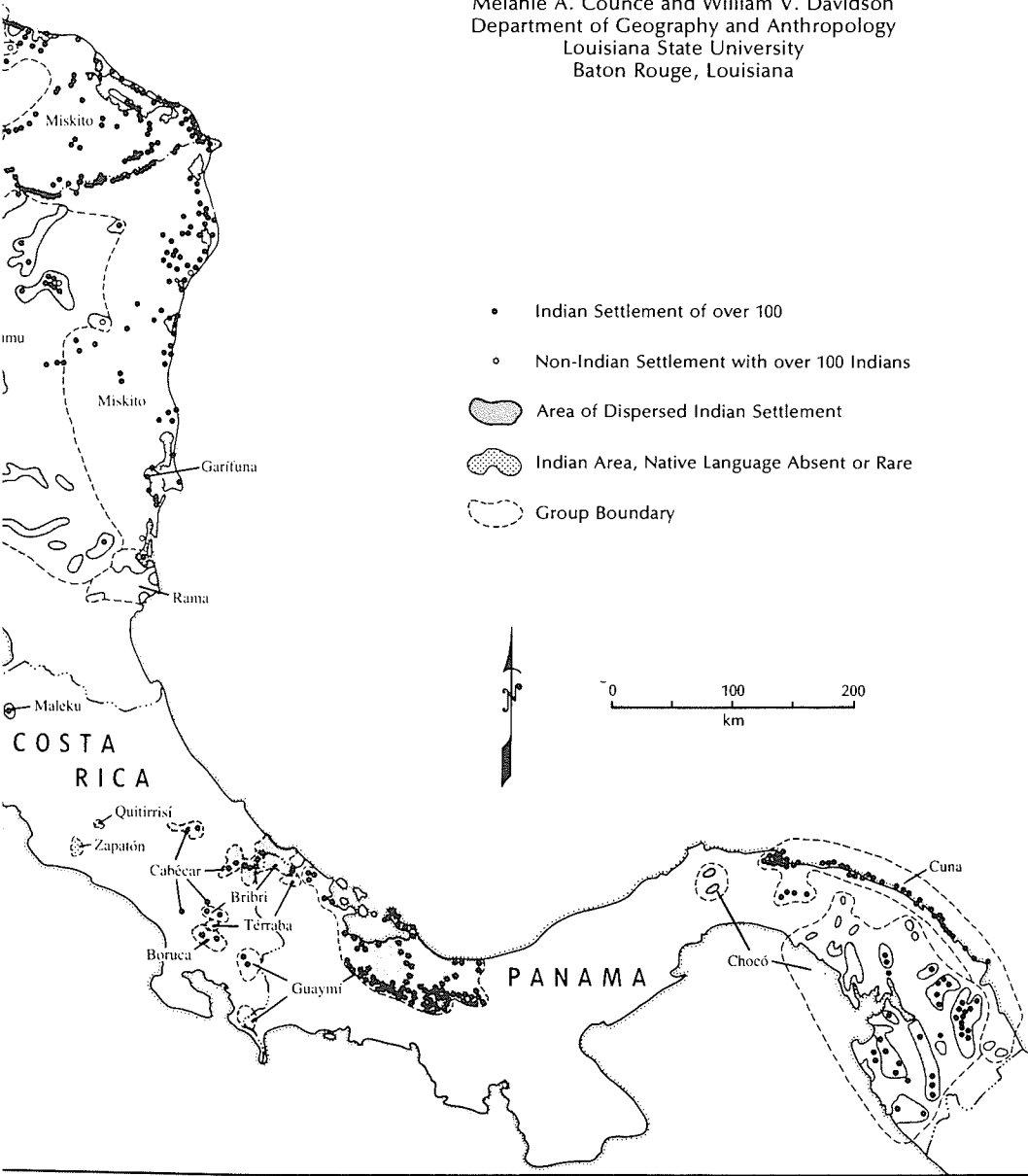
*The same papal edict of 1493 gave Portugal a part of the New World—what amounted to the eastern portion of present-day Brazil.

THE INDIAN QUESTION



INDIANS OF CENTRAL AMERICA 1980s

Compiled by
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But in the southeast, because there were few Indians, and because those who survived lived far from Spanish settlements, there was relatively less fear of the Indians—and less imagined need to keep the “savages” down. Not unrelated to this low level of conflict was the declining importance of Indians to the regional economy. By the end of the 16th century, in much of Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica, labor was provided mostly by the growing *mestizo* population.

Things were different in most of Mesoamerica. There the Indians remained vital to the colonial (and post-colonial) economy. *Repartimientos* (forced labor drafts), debt peonage, and sharecropping kept Indians captive on the haciendas long after the *encomiendas* were curtailed. Life was not much better in the *pueblos*. “The demands for [Indian] produce and labor were constant,” observed the historian Murdo MacLeod—so constant, in fact, that many Indians chose peonage on the haciendas over the supposed freedom of the *pueblos*.

Largely because the Indians were so vital to the Mesoamerican economy, the creoles and *ladinos* believed that they needed periodic reminders of their low status: Such treatment understandably reinforced the fears of the Indians, who kept alive their hope of eventual liberation in rituals such as the “Dance of the Conquest” or even in outright rebellion. One notable uprising was staged by Indians in the Chiapas and Guatemalan highlands in 1712. Colonial authorities retaliated with wholesale executions and forced resettlements, meeting terror with counter-terror in what was becoming clearly defined as the conquest tradition of Mesoamerica.

Indian labor, whether scarce (as in most of the southeast) or abundant (as in most of Mesoamerica), failed to bring great pros-

perity to the Spanish colonies in Central America. Gold and silver mining in Honduras produced disappointing yields, and Spain’s tight control of the colonial trade kept down the prices of the colony’s cocoa and indigo exports. The Kingdom of Guatemala, which had acquired de facto autonomy from New Spain in the mid-16th century (and which encompassed all of Central America except Panama), remained a particularly impoverished backwater of the Spanish empire. Spain’s new Bourbon monarchs, starting with Philip V in 1700, tried to open up trade within the empire, but their efforts did little good for the Central American colony.

The Bourbons’ attempt to assert stronger royal control did, however, have one lasting effect on the Kingdom of Guatemala. It reduced the autonomy that locally born landlords—the creole elite—had acquired through their domination of town councils. Seeing their power stripped by representatives of the imperial court in Santiago de Guatemala, discontented creoles became receptive to the independence movement that began to stir throughout the empire in the late 18th century.

In 1821, Central America allowed itself to be annexed to Mexico in order to win independence from Spain; two years later the union with Mexico dissolved. But before Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica declared themselves independent republics, they tried briefly to live together as the United Provinces of Central America. (Panama, part of Colombia, became independent only in 1903, and Belize remained a British colony until 1981.) The federation was effectively dead by 1838, but one ironic consequence of the liberal experiment was that the Indians were left worse off than they had been before independence: The crown’s protection—slight though it had been—was no longer available to them. As the historian

Héctor Pérez-Brignoli has shown, the new ruling classes of Central America, whether bourgeois, oligarchical, or aristocratic, failed to forge "a new collaboration and consensus to replace the crumbling colonial paternalism. Control rested therefore exclusively on exploitation, violence, and terror."

In the specific case of state-Indian relations, however, Pérez-Brignoli's description holds far more for the Mesoamerican region than for the southeast. One finds many examples of a more benign state of government-Indian affairs in the southeast well before the resolution of the Sandinista-Miskito conflict during the 1980s.

Shortly after Panama gained independence from Colombia in 1903, for instance, the new government ran into trouble with its largest Indian tribe, the Cuna. These proud Indians lived mainly on, or just off, the northeast coast of the country, but some lived along the sensitive border with Colombia—and many retained a fondness for their former rulers. The Panamanian government naturally wanted to win over these Indians; its strategy was assimilation. But when the Cuna resisted, the government committed a costly error: It sent policemen to the Cuna's islands, charging them with the impossible task of eradicating the Indians' folkways and customs. That proved to be too much for the Cuna traditionalists, many of whom had won the friendship and support of American ethnologists and missionaries. During the festival of Carnival in 1925, the Cuna rebelled, killing some 30 policemen, Panamanians, and acculturated Indians.

But the government response was remarkably tempered. Partly in response to the urgings of U.S. officials, the government decided to negotiate. The two sides worked out an agreement that allowed the Cuna control over a portion of their traditional homeland, including the offshore islands

and a ribbon of mainland territory. The Indian reserve, or *comarca*, of San Blas has been respected by all subsequent Panamanian governments. Today, some 35,000 Cuna enjoy great autonomy, even as they participate in national politics.

But if the *comarca* typified the Indian policies of the southeastern states—and even influenced the arrangement that the Sandinistas later worked out with the Miskito—the conquest tradition remains very much alive in Guatemala and El Salvador. The Indian populations there are still very large; in Guatemala not only large (maybe even half of the eight million population) but also recognizable. Clearly, though, the price of retaining a distinct Indian identity has been high. It has often provoked the government campaigns of terror, and it has made it easy for the government to identify the "enemy" once those campaigns were under way.

The situation in El Salvador is quite different. According to a 1989 estimate, there may be around 500,000 Indians in that country of 5.4 million. But they are close to being an invisible people, most of them having abandoned their distinctive native dress and customs under pressure from the dominant creole culture. Their assimilation, however, is only a different response to the conquest tradition.

The plight of El Salvador's Indians had been terrible ever since the conquest, but it reached a low point during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the country's coffee-based economy collapsed. In January 1932, shortly after the military overthrow of a progressive president, Arturo Araujo, a band of Indians armed with machetes swooped down on a cluster of landlords and storekeepers in southwestern El Salvador, hacking about 35 of them to death and looting their homes and stores. Among the leaders of the uprising was



An early 20th-century photograph of group of Cuna Indians on the island of El Tigri. The nose ring was but one of the native customs the Panamanian government tried to eradicate.

Augustin Farabundo Martí, a communist whose renown lives on in the name of El Salvador's contemporary revolutionary organization, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). General Maximiliano Hernandez, the usurper, responded to the Indian revolt with an organized reign of terror. According to eyewitnesses, soldiers rounded up anyone who looked or dressed like an Indian, women and children included, and conducted mass executions. The death toll reached 30,000 according to some estimates. For years after, in radio broadcasts and newspaper articles, *ladino* commentators spoke of the need to exterminate all of the country's Indians so that insurrections such as that of 1932 would not be repeated.

The Indians took the hint. No further massacres were needed. Instead, the Indians have become an indistinguishable part of El Salvador's vast laboring population. To be sure, the country has experienced repeated bouts of terrorism and civil strife since 1979, including street fighting in the capital between the army and FMLN guerrillas in late 1989. But the government no longer responds by singling out the Indians. Can one safely conclude that the mentality of the conquest tradition has run its course in El Salvador? Not at all. The forces of reaction now direct terror at all of the laboring poor. The indiscriminate shelling of the poorer neighborhoods of San Salvador in the most recent uprising shows that the conquest mentality lives on, despite the

relative invisibility of the much dreaded *Indios*.

The situation of the Indians in Guatemala, meanwhile, has become increasingly complicated. Twenty years ago, anthropologists claimed that the Indians were being rapidly assimilated into the dominant *ladino* culture. In some important ways, they were wrong. Government policies, for one thing, reinforced Indian separateness. As recently as 1984, the Guatemalan army brought thousands of displaced Indians into newly formed communities—"model towns." Replicating the system used by colonial Spain, the army found these settlements easier to keep under surveillance than the scattered hamlets the Indians formerly inhabited. As in the past, Indians were expected to serve for no compensation. They were forced into unarmed militias to patrol the countryside and to monitor guerrilla activities. When not on patrol, the Indian men and boys would join their families in scratching out a meager existence, farming in nearby fields or performing menial labor for *ladinos* in neighboring communities.

That is part of the story of Guatemala's Indians—many still oppressed, some even terrorized. Another part, equally valid, also disproves the prediction

of assimilation, but in a way that holds out some hope for the future of the Indians. Indeed, according to this story, Indian fortunes are already on the rise in some of Guatemala's rural departments—those, in particular, that the earlier insurgency bypassed. In village after village, Indians are starting small agribusinesses, accumulating capital, even buying back land that they had earlier sold to the *ladinos*. They are effectively creating a new Indian economy—one that harnesses Indian labor and resources rather than leaving them open to *ladino* exploitation.

It is, of course, all to the good that the Indians of Guatemala are beginning to show confidence and pride in their own native identity. Further economic strength and independence will only bolster these. But self-respect is not enough to bring an end to the dismal record of state-Indian relations in the Mesoamerican states of Central America. That will require the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador—with the encouragement of their biggest backer, the United States—to follow the example of their neighbors in the southeast and take steps to reduce the inequalities, the threat of violence, and the perpetuation of fear. It will require, in other words, that the elites of these nations finally abandon the time-worn ways of the conquest tradition.

THE RECONQUEST

by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard

Guatemala is the only country in Central America with a large Indian population. The Indians, mostly of Mayan ancestry, are probably a majority, although it is hard to know for sure since there is much debate over who is, and who is not, an *indigena*. Once a family of Indians moves to the city, they can turn themselves into *ladinos* (as *mestizos* are called in much of Central America) after a couple of generations if they learn to think and behave like *ladinos*—that is, if they speak only Spanish and abandon their Indian culture. I recall meeting a Guatemalan army lieutenant with unmistakable Mayan features who spoke in a detached way about the Indian conscripts in his platoon, as if they were of a different species. He considered himself a *ladino*, and so, therefore, did everybody else.

By 1960 the rate of assimilation was so high that anthropologists began to despair, fearing that Mayan culture would gradually disappear during the next 30 years or so. In certain parts of Guatemala, this has happened. But the great surprise is that the Indians have generally held their ground, and in the well-documented case of San Antonio Aguascalientes, the *ladinos* themselves are finding it useful to become bilingual, learning Cakchiquel so as not to be marginalized in a *pueblo* where the Indians increasingly play a dominant civic and economic role. It is no longer far-fetched to imagine the Maya doing what the Japanese have done: mastering the machinery of a modern economy without giving up their

distinctive character and customs.

The extent of this Indian renaissance was brought home to me on a recent visit to Aguacatan, a remote farming community whose inhabitants are about 80 percent Aguacatec Indian and 20 percent *ladinos*. The first shock was the number of television aerials on the adobe cottages dotted all over the rich green valley. The second was the sight of young Indians racing past on ten-speed mountain bicycles, imports from Taiwan that sell for about \$175 each. The central plaza of the *pueblo* was alive with commerce and movement. Aguacatec women walked along busily, dressed in blue and green headdresses with baubles falling down behind their ears. Beneath their outlandish Indian costume, or *traje* as it is known, many were wearing stout leather shoes—a concession to convenience. Among the crowd there were a number of *ladinos*. A few were chatting politely to the Indians; most were just minding their own business.

Until recently, Aguacatecos were terrified of *ladinos*. "It was awful," said Dimitrio Rodriguez, a soft-spoken, bespectacled Indian, as we sat drinking Pepsi on his verandah. "My father can remember being seized by *ladinos* as he was walking down the road. They whipped him and sent him off as a beast of burden to fetch goods from Huehuetenango [a day's walk away]."

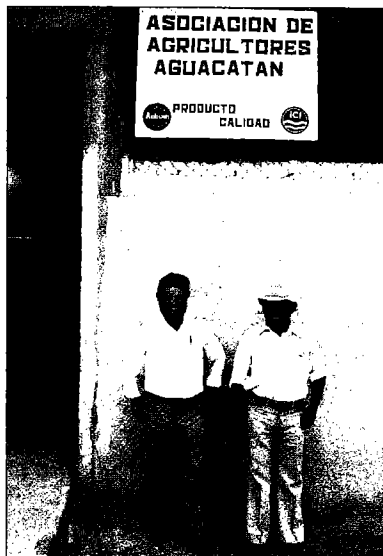
Forced labor was abolished after the revolution of 1944, but the *ladinos* continued to control the power structure of Aguacatan, and a form of apartheid persisted. Indians were not allowed to use the sidewalks, for instance, and they had to step

aside in shops if a *ladino* were waiting to be served. The first time *ladinos* ever met socially with Aguacatecos in a private home was in 1972, when an American anthropologist, Douglas Brintnall, invited both to the birthday party of his young son.

Today Aguacatan is a different world. Dimitrio's brother is the top administrative officer in the local government and is considering a run for mayor. His cousin is a Catholic priest, the first Aguacateco ever to be ordained. And last year Dimitrio himself finished his medical training at the University of San Carlos and returned home to become Aguacatan's first Indian physician.

Dimitrio's family lives in an imposing farmhouse perched above terraces of elaborately irrigated garlic. It was this unlikely crop that lifted his parents out of poverty during the 1950s and '60s, and which has since transformed the whole economy of Aguacatan. The difference in yield between garlic and the Mayan staple of maize is staggering. An acre of land currently yields about \$140 worth of maize, or \$2,600 of garlic. Overwhelmingly, the Indians have been the quickest to seize the opportunity, and many have accumulated enough capital to buy back land lost to *ladino* creditors during the last century. The five largest garlic growers are all Indian.

The *ladinos* have stuck to their tradi-



The garlic industry allowed the Indians of Aguacatan, and of other parts of Guatemala, to stage their own economic "miracle." Two leaders of the Aguacatan Agricultural Association (left), one Indian and one ladino, stand in front of their cooperative building. An Indian woman (below) removes garlic stalks with pruning scissors.



tional role as traders. For a while they made fat profits buying garlic from the Indians and selling it in Guatemala City. But during the 1980s, the Indians not only caught up but leapt ahead in the sophistication of their marketing. When I visited Humberto Herrera, president of an association of 500 Aguacateco smallholders, he seemed interested that I was English and began chatting about London. To my aston-

ishment, he said he had just returned from a trip promoting garlic in Covent Garden. His association has built its own packing plant on the outskirts of Aguacatan, from which it exports directly to the United States, England, and Panama, without any dealings through *ladino* middlemen.

The influence of *ladinos* in most of Guatemala's Indian towns depends, to a great extent, on a monopoly of access to the outside world. In Aguacatan they have clearly lost this, in every sense. The most sophisticated man I met in the *pueblo* was Pedro Castro, an Indian who runs the local branch of Habitat For Humanity. He has been to the United States six times, giving talks on behalf of the organization. On one visit, he had had a private meeting with Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, who are closely involved with Habitat's mission of building houses for the poor throughout the world. "They seemed like very nice people," he said nonchalantly. Castro is an Indian nationalist, and although fluently bilingual, he insists on speaking to his fellow Indians in a pure form of Aguacateco, without Spanish adulteration.

In *The Revolt Against the Dead*, a brilliant study of Aguacatan based on fieldwork done in the early 1970s, Douglas Brintnall writes that it was an American Maryknoll priest with *indigenista* sympathies who got Indian education off the ground. Seeing that the municipal school was dominated by *ladinos*, this priest started a bilingual parish school for the Aguacatecos. Although it charges higher fees, it has been a huge success. Indeed, the standard is so much higher that some ambitious *ladinos* have enrolled their children in the parish school.

It was not inevitable that the Indians would respond to the new opportunities with such impressive energy. First they had

to escape from one of the paralyzing deformities of their own culture, notably the *cofradía*, a religious fraternity imported from Spain. Deformity is perhaps too harsh a word, for many historians would argue that this exotic institution kept Mayan traditions alive after the great wrecking attempt of the Spanish conquest. Certainly, the Indians transformed the *cofradía* into something uniquely Mayan, a sort of theocratic council of elders that ran village life. Although Catholic on the outside, it was strongly pre-Columbian on the inside.

The beauty of the *cofradía* was its leveling effect. A rich Indian would usually rise to a senior post in the hierarchy, and the higher he rose, the more he was expected to spend on lavish Christian religious festivals. A sort of wealth tax prevented the emergence of an hereditary Indian aristocracy. But it was an unproductive tax. Almost the entire savings of the *pueblo* were spent on ceremony, and much of it went to ritual drinking. There was no capital accumulation for investment, ensuring a primitive static economy. Moreover, the *cofradías* tended to be reactionary. In 1962 the elders of a neighboring community sent out a machete gang to destroy the new school. According to Ricardo Falla, a Jesuit priest working in the area, the *cofradía* said that the school only taught the children "to rob, become lazy, learn bad prayers and bad language, and to lose respect for their fathers and mothers."

The *ladinos* did not participate in the *cofradía*, but they have long understood how it kept the Indians down, and have often been the most vigilant guardians of Indian *costumbre* (custom). In Aguacatan, for instance, they even used their judicial power, illegally, to enforce obedience to the traditionalist hierarchy. By the 1950s, some

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Indians were waking up to the subtle oppression of the *cofradía*. In 1955 Dimitrio's uncle became the first Aguacateco from a respected family to abandon *costumbre* and convert to Catholicism (without considering himself any less Indian). He set off an avalanche. Over the next generation the flower of Aguacatec youth, those destined for leadership of the *cofradía*, rebelled against the religion of their fathers.

The *cofradía* has withered. At last, the Aguacatecos are investing in their future, saving money and educating their children. To what degree these changes have occurred in the rest of Guatemala is an open and highly debated question. The Marxist guerrilla uprising of the early 1980s has left a political mosaic in the Indian highlands. In some villages the Catholics, or catechists as they are called, became identified with the guerrillas. This identification tended to occur wherever radical priests and nuns had been active. (It is believed that three liberation theology priests joined the Guerrilla Army of the Poor.) Army repression

made Catholicism dangerous in these communities, allowing the *cofradía* to enjoy a small revival. Most of the refugees, however, sought safety in one of the Pentecostal churches that have sprung up all over Guatemala. These *evangélicos* have the same ethic of thrift and hard work as their fellow converts in the Catholic Church, and they seem to be transforming their villages in a similar way.

It is tempting to think that the Maya are at last emancipating themselves. They are such long-suffering people, so elegant, dignified, and loyal. Foreigners are forever romanticizing them, projecting their own ideologies onto the inscrutable Indian culture. The Left likes to imagine the Maya as proto-socialists, and the Right (I confess my bias), as budding entrepreneurs. On the whole they have both been disappointed. But the social revolution has run so deep over the last generation that I predict, with caution, that nothing can hold back the Maya any longer.

BACKGROUND BOOKS

LATIN AMERICA'S INDIAN QUESTION

Christopher Columbus's famous confusion led the European invaders of the Americas to refer to the inhabitants of the New World indiscriminately as Indians. Similar uncertainty has bedeviled all discussions of the Indians ever since. We can only guess how many Indians there were in the Americas when the Europeans arrived—between 35 and 40 million is one reasonable estimate. Nor can we establish how many Indians there are living in the Americas today. This is largely because of the centuries' old debate over how to define an Indian, and who does the defining.

In colonial times, relations with and policies concerning the Indians were important items on the agendas of the colonizing powers. In the 19th century, however, the Indians became either physically or socially marginal to the newly independent nations of the western hemisphere. Indians at the frontiers were considered savages to be exterminated or, at best, rounded up and confined in remote places, where they would not interfere with "progress." Meanwhile, in Central America and the Andean countries, where the new republics depended on a large Indian labor force, systematic attempts were made to compel the Indians to give up their identity and become assimilated into the national mainstream. At various times and places, the very category of "Indian" was formally abolished. Even in the absence of such formal prohibitions, the matter of who should be considered Indian remains undecided in many countries. Over the years, Indians have been defined, variously, as people of a certain racial stock, as people who can speak only an Indian language, as people who live in Indian communities, as people who maintain Indian customs in mixed communities, or as people who combine a number of these characteristics and sometimes others as well. Since the criteria are applied differently in different places and even differently by different people writing about the same place, both the definition and total numbers of "Indians" in the Americas today are uncertain.

One thing is clear: The European invasion of the Americas was a demographic disaster for

the Indians. They perished from warfare and harsh treatment but in much larger numbers from disease and famine. The biological, social, and cultural consequences of the European invasion are well described in Alfred Crosby's **The Columbian Exchange** (Greenwood Press, 1972). He points out that the conquest proved a shock to Indian society "... such as only H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* can suggest to us." Crosby, who teaches American studies at the University of Texas, documents the tremendous biological and demographic transformations that took place when the two worlds met; he tells how the diseases of the Old World cut a swathe through the populations of the New, causing the Indians to experience a "spectacular period of mortality."

Those that survived the ravages of disease, famine, warfare, and maltreatment found themselves in a different world, one organized to meet the demands of their European overlords. A whole array of institutions was introduced to enable the colonists and their sovereigns to control the human and natural resources of the Americas. These differed from one region to another, according to the traditions of the invading nations and the nature of the Indian societies they encountered. The latter varied from the large Aztec and Inca polities to unstratified societies that lived by hunting and gathering. Eric Wolf, professor of anthropology at Herbert Lehman College, presents a broad historical overview of the impact of colonialism on native peoples in **Europe and the People without History** (Univ. of Calif., 1982). His book gives an excellent account of the nature of pre-conquest societies in the Americas and of their transformation during colonial times.

Meanwhile, the encounter with the Indians forced Europeans to rethink their views of the world and its inhabitants. The famous debates between the Dominican Las Casas and 16th-century Spanish theologian Sepúlveda are carefully analyzed in historian Lewis Hanke's **Aristotle and the American Indians** (Ind. Univ., 1959). The rights of the Indians were at issue, and these depended partly on how Indians

were defined. Were they human? If so, what kind of humans were they? Were they savages, cannibals, heretics, or in other ways beyond the pale? If not, what were they, and how should they be treated?

Much has been written about the impact of the Indians on European thought. Anthony Pagden, an English scholar, treats the subject at length in **The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology** (Cambridge Univ., 1982). In **The Conquest of America:**



The Question of the Other (English trans., Harper & Row, 1984), Tzvetan Todorov, a French literary theorist, offers a strongly philosophical reading of the change in Europeans' views of themselves as a result of their encounter with the Indians. Todorov's discussion of both Indian and European attitudes contrasts dramatically with that of Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan writer who set out to retell the history of the New World since the conquest in his epic trilogy, **Memory of Fire**. In **Genesis** (1985), **Faces and Masks** (1987), and **Century of the Wind** (1988; all English trans., Pantheon), he constructs out of excerpts and vignettes a vivid collage that makes the reader feel the horror as well as the grandiose drama of the history of the Americas.

Horror is a recurrent theme in the Indians' view of the conquest, and it is eloquently recorded in the Mayan chronicles of **Chilam Balam**, written soon after the Spaniards had seized control of Mexico. Nathan Wachtel caught this sense of shock and horror in his pioneering book, **The Vision of the Vanquished** (English trans., Barnes & Noble, 1977). "The Indians," he wrote, "seem to have been struck numb, unable to make sense of events, as if their mental universe had been suddenly shattered." Wachtel does not stop there, however, but takes his story up to the present in order to show how the Indians, particularly those in the Andes, succeeded in defending and perpetuating their own values in the face of powerful and determined efforts to eradicate them.

This remarkable tenacity, after the initial shock and through the continuing horror, is the subject of other recent studies, including Nancy Farriss's **Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival** (Princeton Univ., 1984) and Karen Spalding's **Huaro-chiri: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule** (Stanford Univ., 1984). Nor was Indian resistance merely ideological. During the three centuries of colonial rule, periodic rebellions broke out, and in some parts of the Americas the Indians were never conquered. The rebellions often achieved temporary or local success, but precisely because they were local or at most regional affairs, they were always suppressed as soon as the power of the state could be concentrated and brought to bear against them. Two excellent studies of such rebellions, in the Andes and Central America, respectively, have recently appeared: **Resistance, Rebellion and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries**, edited by historian Steve Stern (Univ. of Wisc., 1987) and **Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico**, edited by historian Friedrich Katz (Princeton Univ., 1988). These volumes are unusual because they deal with the 19th and 20th centuries, and with the Indian-peasant continuum. They emphasize, as Stern puts it, that an "ethnic component is built into the oppressions, patterns of adaptation and resistance, sense of grievance, and aspirations that will loom large in the explanation and analysis of revolt."

There is a striking contrast between the

wealth of materials referring to Indians in colonial times and the dearth of similar treatments for the 19th century. As the newly independent countries of Latin America turned their attention to modernization and nation-building, they saw no place for Indians in either agenda. The Indian question thus came to be seen as an anachronism, and it was assumed that the Indians of the past would soon become the *campesinos* of the future.

In the 20th century, scholars tended to deal with national questions (which did not include the Indians) or to publish studies of Indian peoples or communities (in which the subjects were only tenuously related to national affairs). The most important exceptions came from Peru and Mexico, where traditions of *indigenismo*, or concern for the nations' Indian heritage, became part of the national discourse. Peruvian writers such as José Carlos Mariategui, Haya de la Torre, and Hildebrando Castro Pozo incorporated a somewhat romantic view of the Indian into their political analyses, while in Mexico Manuel Gamio, Moises Saenz, and others dealt with the Indian question from a Mexican perspective. It was in Mexico, after the revolution of 1910–20, that the most serious attempt was made to put *indigenismo* into practice. But the traditional theses of Mexican *indigenismo*, namely that anthropology in the service of the revolutionary state should assist Indians to blend into the national melting pot, are now much criticized.

As the 20th century draws to a close, first-rate books dealing with the Indians' place in their own countries are relatively rare. Even the problems of Peru, rent as it is with violent conflicts, are regularly written with only passing mention of the peculiar circumstances of its large Indian population. The same could be said of most of the countries of the Americas, with the exception of Guatemala and Brazil.

The slaughter of Indians by the Guatemalan authorities in recent years has been described

and analyzed in **Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis**, edited by Robert Carmack (Univ. of Okla., 1988). The contributors to this volume show that the problems of Guatemala, often represented to North Americans as resulting from the conflict between communism and capitalism, are in fact rooted in the relations between Indians and the non-Indian elites.

Meanwhile the mistreatment of Indians in the Amazonian regions of Brazil, carried out in the name of development, is getting some attention in the world press. Yet international concern seems to focus more on the destruction of the rain forest than on the rights of the Indians, and there is no good general study showing why the Indian question has become such a sensitive political issue.

Until recently the Indians of Central and South America were treated as if they were invisible, except by specialists whose works were regarded as having little national significance. That is changing now that the Indians themselves are asserting their right to maintain their own cultures. However, the Indian demand for cultural pluralism is rarely taken seriously. Throughout the Americas, indigenous peoples continue to be caught in the crossfires of national politics. This has led to a growing realization among scholars that the situation of the Indians cannot be studied except in relation to each nation's larger political agenda. At the same time, it is also becoming clear that the nations of the Americas cannot be fully understood without taking their treatment of the Indians into account. Fresh studies informed by these ideas are now in progress. They give us hope that the quincentennial of Columbus's first landfall in the New World may be celebrated by the emergence of a more balanced vision of the shaping of the Americas.

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