THE NEW FRONTIER

by Brian J. Kelly and Mark London

During the summer of 1980, gold fever infected Brazil. Word of a major find in the eastern Amazon spread throughout the country. There were rumors of men unearthing gold rocks as big as their fists, of men who could not read or write turning into millionaires overnight and signing their checks with a thumbprint.

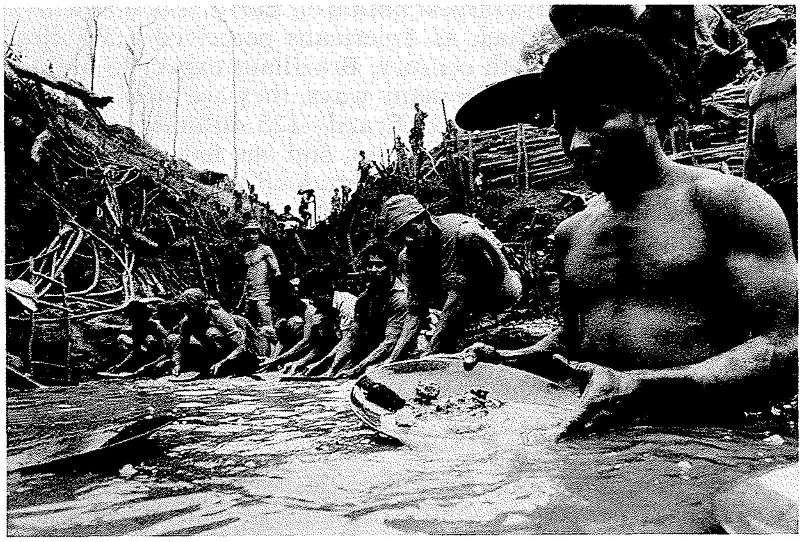
Soon the rumors were confirmed.

Three centuries after the gold strikes that had first lured thousands of men into the interior, Brazilians descended on Serra Pelada (Naked Mountain), the place where the discovery had been made, a small hill amid the dense rain forest that covers the northern half of Brazil. They came by the busload to Marabá, the closest town, and then plunged into the jungle for the 50-mile hike to the mine.

Doctors, lawyers, and businessmen in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo left their wives and children behind for a chance at El Dorado, traveling 1,000 miles north along the dirt roads that have been cut through the jungle by the government since the early 1960s in its drive to open the Amazon to exploration, exploitation, and settlement. From the rich croplands of the south came tenant farmers left jobless as the big farms switched from the labor-intensive cultivation of coffee to the mechanized cultivation of soybeans. And from the "horn" of Brazil—the drought-plagued, overpopulated Northeast jutting out into the Atlantic—came young men from city slums and subsistence farmers who could no longer subsist.

Excavated in places to a depth of 300 feet and divided into individual claims four meters square, laced together by makeshift ladders, the hilltop came to resemble a sugar bowl swarming with ants. Photographers for *Manchete*, a *Life*-like monthly, feasted on the sight of some 25,000 men sifting through less than one square mile of ground gouged out of the jungle. TV Globo, Brazil's largest network, brought the spectacle home to 80 million viewers.

The miners called the site Babylonia, after the Hanging Gardens. A handful struck it rich. One man (women were barred from the site) grossed $6 million worth of gold in a single day.



Garimpeiros *panning for gold at Babylonia, the mine at Serra Pelada.*

Most found almost nothing and were reduced to hauling the luckier miners' dirt for a daily wage.*

Government geologists eventually acknowledged Serra Pelada to be an exceptional find, one more manifestation of the mineral wealth waiting to be extracted in the eastern Amazon. They recommended that Serra Pelada be closed to individual prospectors and mined by machine, a process that would double Serra Pelada's average annual gold production of (currently) about nine metric tons.

But the normally unsentimental generals who have run Brazil since 1964 demurred. Even in a nation as financially embarrassed as Brazil—reeling from an inflation rate nearing triple digits and a foreign debt of some $84 billion—a few hundred million dollars worth of unexpected income paled alongside the symbolic value of a mountain of gold, a mountain yielding not to the government's earth-moving equipment but to the picks and shovels of thousands of Brazilians with a common dream.

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*While the government, under Brazilian law, technically owns everything below the earth's surface, a Serra Pelada *garimpeiro* could place his nuggets of gold on the counter of the local bank—a shack with a counter—and receive in return three-quarters of its international price (adjusted daily). The government kept the rest to finance police protection, medical care, warehouses, and geologists who advised the prospectors on mining techniques.

For Brazil, the fifth largest nation on Earth, is a land with a vision of greatness. Much as Americans perceived a Manifest Destiny in the early 19th century, Brazilians expect to build a great nation in the 20th. In many ways, they are already doing so. The Federative Republic of Brazil—125 million people in a union of 23 states, three territories, and one federal district—already ranks first worldwide in production of coffee, sugar, beans, and frozen concentrated orange juice (from which it reaped a $170 million bonanza in 1982 after severe frosts blighted the Florida citrus crop); second in soybean exports; third in forest reserves; fourth in hydroelectric potential and beef production. It appears to be first in iron ore reserves and is a leader in alcohol-fuel technology.

Growing Pains

Yet at the same time, the difficulties that afflict most of the rest of the Third World—inflation, unemployment, illiteracy, poor health care—exist also in Brazil, and on a typically Brazilian scale. One-half of Brazil's population consists of children under 16, whose ranks are swelling by about four million a year. The country's economic "miracle" of the late 1960s and early '70s failed to survive the oil price increases of 1973–74 and 1979. Disparities in income, outlook, and opportunity are extreme.

Brazil desperately needs the wealth the Amazon has thus far withheld, the capital it can create and attract, the safety valve it promises for a burgeoning population. Above all, Brazil needs the hope. The potential of the Amazon is what is new and promising about the country. Brazilians look to the Amazon with the "restless, inventive, self-confident, optimistic, enormously energetic" spirit that historian Frederick Jackson Turner saw in the American frontiersman.

"The Amazon is like your Alaska—far away, rich, empty, and mysterious," a Brazilian businessman explained over lunch not long ago. Sitting in the American Club, 30 stories above the heart of Rio de Janeiro's busy financial district, the business-

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man emphasized that the jungle is vastly more important to Brazil than America's 50th state is to the Lower Forty-Eight: "The future of your country," he said, "does not depend on Alaska."

Brazil is a big country, and the Amazon is as far away from the population centers as Alaska is from San Francisco. From Belém, a port city of one million just below the equator at the mouth of the Amazon River, it is four hours by jet to São Paulo, the industrial heartland of Brazil, and another hour and a half to Pôrto Alegre, in the southernmost part of the country. The more temperate south contains most of Brazil's wealth and more than three-fifths of its population. This is at once old Brazil and modern Brazil; it is the Brazil, one might say, that the Brazilians have begun to outgrow both physically and psychologically.

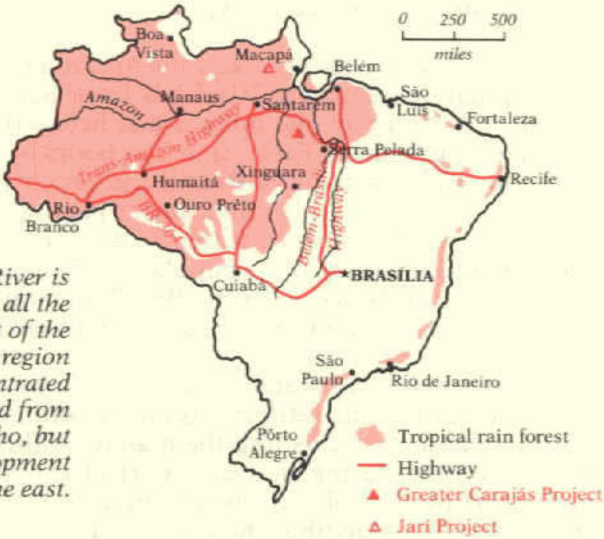
In the rich farm states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná, the settlements on the rolling plains are European in character, reflecting the massive influx of German and Italian settlers during the early part of this century. In some towns, the parents of the blond-haired, blue-eyed children still speak German. Curitiba, the capital of Paraná, is run as efficiently as, say, Zurich, and its European flavor prompts the question, "Where is the Third World?"

Dry Lives

Farther north, the state of São Paulo shows both how far Brazil has progressed and how far it still has to go. This state accounts for more than half of Brazil's total output—everything from oranges and coffee to autos, aircraft, computers and ships; it is the most industrialized region in the entire Southern Hemisphere. An hour's drive from the Atlantic coast, the sprawling metropolis of São Paulo is at once urbane and primitive, with clusters of 30-story skyscrapers linked at ground level by crowded highways and ringed by vast stretches of scrapwood-and-cardboard slums—the *favelas*.

There are 12.5 million people living in or around the city of São Paulo. Some 200 miles to the north, in Rio de Janeiro, there are nine million more, living in similarly varied circumstances. Rio is the tourist town of the travel posters, with its beachfront boulevards where talk in the outdoor cafés is of politics, sex, and football, to a samba beat. Starting at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain, the glass-and-concrete hotels line the seashore. But tucked into the steep hillsides that account for so much of Rio's beauty are teeming *favelas* where one-quarter of the city's in-

DEVELOPING THE AMAZON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miles
Boa Vista
Macapá
Belém
Amazon
Manaus
Santarém
São Luís
Fortaleza
Serra Pelada
Trans-Amazon Highway
Humaitá
Xinguara
Recife
Rio Branco
Ouro Prêto
BR-364
Belém-Brasília Highway
Cuiabá
BRASÍLIA
São Paulo
Rio de Janeiro
Pôrto Alegre
Tropical rain forest
Highway
Greater Carajás Project
Jari Project

The Amazon River is navigable by ship all the way to Peru. Most of the settlement in the region thus far is concentrated along the road from Cuiabá to Pôrto Velho, but the major development projects are in the east.

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

habitants live, without electricity or running water or jobs (though it is technically illegal to be unemployed in Brazil).

The poor have flocked to Brazil's great cities—São Paulo is growing by 500,000 people a year—because opportunities to earn a living in the countryside are often nonexistent. If the nine rural Northeastern states seceded from the rest of Brazil, the 30 million *nordestinos* would be living in one of the world's poorest nations. Once this territory supported coastal rain forests, until they were cleared by coffee and sugar producers. Little grows there now, because the January-to-May rainy season has not come in four years. The chronic misery of the Northeast has been best portrayed by the novelist Graciliano Ramos, whose most famous work says much in its title: *Vidas Secas* (*Dry Lives*).

The future of Brazil is partly a question of numbers. The numbers are the 40 million poor people, wherever they happen to live, and the annual birthrate exceeding three percent. Can the Amazon, with its inhospitable climate and its deadly diseases and its unforgiving terrain, really provide a new frontier? How many small farmers and slum dwellers will dare to pack up and move to a new land? How many of the sons and daughters of Rio's affluent professionals are willing to brave the hard-ships? What kinds of entrepreneurs will the Amazon attract, and how much money are they prepared to risk?

Such questions were raised in Brazil once before: during the long gestation of Brasília, the country's 23-year-old capital in the otherwise empty central plain. Brasília was 135 years in the planning, and during that century and a half, the *idea* of the city seemed to promise Brazil a brilliant future, a future that, it seemed, always lay just beyond reach.

Staining the Sea

As early as 1822, when Dom Pedro I declared Brazil's independence from Portugal, Brazilians already envisioned a new capital in the interior, supplanting Rio de Janeiro on the coast. The name "Brasília" and a general location for the city were suggested in a postscript to the first Constitution (1824). On the centennial of Brazil's independence, a symbolic cornerstone was even laid. But it was not until 1957 that President Juscelino Kubitschek, making good on a campaign promise, announced that Brasília would finally arise from the red dirt and scrub brush of the Planalto Central. The architect he chose, Oscar Niemeyer, and the city planner, Lucio Costa, created what they hoped would be an egalitarian city whose design would foster a blending of all classes.

Brasília opened on schedule in 1960, but the ideal society never materialized. The city today is architecturally striking and in many ways innovative. (For example, a road system was devised that eliminated intersections.) It is also an austere monument to technocracy where only highly paid military officers, politicians, bureaucrats, and economists can afford to live. The cool, angled structures of steel and glass, set in vast, barren plazas, make a fitting home for a government that is at times remote from its people. Unintended ironies abound. The twin towers where Senators and Deputies maintain their offices were supposed to dominate the skyline as a statement that "the people" owned the city; as it happens, two new bank buildings now loom over them.

Critics of the government—notably Roman Catholic priests, who have provided the most vocal opposition to the regime during 19 years of military rule—consider Brasília a kind of Potemkin Village. "We have beautiful fountains here, but just outside of town they have no running water," the Rev. David Regan, a staff member of the National Conference of Bishops explained. The real Brazil has been banished to the capital's slum suburbs such as Taguatinga and Ceilandia, which do not even appear on most maps even though they are home to 500,000 of Brasília's 1.2 million people.

Beyond Brasília lies the Amazon River Basin. Everything to the north and west of the capital is part of it, comprising one-twentieth of the planet's land and the largest belt of rain forest in the world. Winding 3,900 miles across the South American continent, up to 40 miles wide, only 32 miles shorter than the Nile but with 17 times its volume, the Amazon River together with its tributaries holds one-fifth of the world's fresh water, pouring out a flood that stains the ocean brown 100 miles out in the Atlantic.

The Amazon is among the least populous places in the world—larger than India, but with fewer people than El Salvador. Within this realm lie not only gold but an estimated $1 trillion worth of hardwood trees and 18 billion known tons of iron ore, along with sizable deposits of bauxite, manganese, nickel, copper, tin, kaolin, and diamonds. For centuries, the Amazon has been an unknown and forbidding place; most of it has never been accurately mapped. One reason Kubitschek built Brasília was to create a jumping-off point to reach the Amazon. And in this respect, at least, he succeeded.

Straggling West

The government's first efforts to integrate the Amazon into the rest of Brazil went into the construction of highways, beginning with the two-lane Belém-Brasília Highway in 1960 and continuing in 1970 with the Trans-Amazon Highway, which now cuts 2,150 miles westward across the country, from the Atlantic at Recife almost to the border with Peru. These roads, which for long stretches are still unpaved, opened the jungle to settlement.

The various colonization efforts in the Amazon have had very different results. Movement from the south to the northwest—at first spontaneous, later orchestrated by the government through INCRA, the government colonization agency—has enjoyed far more success than movement westward from the northeast. The roads to the northwest, as it turns out, lead to better soils than do the roads into the interior from Brazil's horn, and the pioneers who travel them, unlike the desperate *nordestinos* straggling west, often bring confidence and expertise acquired on the prosperous commercial farms of the south.

One of these highways, which forms the spine of a new farming frontier in the southwestern Amazon, is known to the bureaucrats as BR-364, and to many who have used it as "the road to the promised land." The journey from end to end—São Paulo to Pôrto Velho—covers 2,300 miles. From Cuiabá to Pôrto Velho takes four days by jeep in the dry season, but up to 40 when the heaviest rains come in March and the solid surface virtually turns to mud. Sometimes people die on buses and trucks stuck for days at an impassable mud hole. Yet they have come by the thousands in the last few years to clear and farm what was once solid jungle in the region called Rondônia, the newest Brazilian state. Rondônia's population grew from about 100,000 in 1970 to 750,000 in 1982.

'I Am the Boss'

Alfonso Andrade, one of the new residents, came to the town of Ouro Prêto in 1976 after the price of cotton dropped by half and the bank foreclosed on his land in São Paulo. He now owns 500 acres, 360 head of cattle, and a well-stocked general store run by his wife. "I came without knowing what I was going to do," he explained. "I had a relative who told me the land was good. I brought four cows and my family." When he arrived, he found that the 250-acre plot he had purchased from the government was solid jungle. With his two sons, then 10 and 11, Andrade cleared the land and planted corn, beans, rice, and cacao. All the crops grew well, and he reported his success to friends and relatives, who packed up and followed him.

In his bare, concrete-floored living room, a picture of Christ the Redeemer pronouncing "God Bless This House" in Portuguese hangs opposite a calendar featuring a pin-up girl in black lace panties. Sitting under the calendar, Andrade ticked off his complaints: He comes down with malaria several times a year; when his children get sick, it is always a crisis; when the road is muddy, supplies are late; there is never a hot shower; he has no television. But he is happy, he said, because he has land.

In the new cattle country of the southeastern Amazon, dominated by corporate landholders clearing 100,000-acre tracts of jungle, Mario Thompson is a different kind of pioneer. He came to the Amazon in 1973 to help establish a 350,000-acre ranch owned by Volkswagen. (Mitsui, Swift Armour, Xerox, Liquigas, and King Ranch are among the other companies with large Amazon holdings.) Thompson slept in a hammock for months. He lived off the land or on supplies dropped by plane. When the land was cleared, he stayed on to supervise the construction of a nearby slaughterhouse.

On weekends, he drives a jeep down the narrow jungle track to 10,000 acres of his own, which he has been clearing for pas-

BRAZIL'S CHANGING CATHOLIC CHURCH

During his 12-day pastoral visit to Brazil in 1980, Pope John Paul II made a point of meeting twice with the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, affirming its status as the corporate voice of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. The Pope also made a point of seconding the message the conference has been sounding in recent years.

"A society that is not socially just and does not intend to be puts its own future in danger," John Paul declared in the slums of Rio. He urged church leaders "to summon consciences, guard people and their liberty, and demand the necessary remedies."

Until 20 years ago, the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil was a pillar of the status quo—first of the colonial planters, then, beginning in the 19th century, of an expanding, city-centered middle class. During the turbulent 1960s, however, a "theology of liberation" began to attract adherents among Latin American bishops. The Brazilian Catholic Church—the largest in the world, with some 112 million baptized members—emerged as the chief opponent of Brazil's military regime.

The National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (founded by reform-minded prelates, many of them from the impoverished Northeast, in 1952) has disclaimed both the subversive intent and the Marxist coloration that some critics in the government and press have sought to bestow. But the bishops have vigorously protested the government's abuses of human rights and its seeming indifference to social inequities. Going beyond the bishops' calls for political and economic reform, priests in São Paulo have opened church doors to illegally striking union members. In the Northeast, clergymen have aligned themselves with tenant farmers in danger of losing their homesteads.

During the late 1960s and into the '70s, throughout Brazil, powerful landowners and the government's security police retaliated with invasions of churches and with beatings, kidnappings, and the torture and murder of religious activists, including priests and nuns. But the church, led by the bishops, stood its ground, and with the coming of *abertura* the situation began to improve.

The Brazilian church's stance is rooted in the so-called preferential option for the poor proclaimed by Latin American bishops meeting at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. The "preferential option" statement endorsed local efforts at social reform by growing numbers of priests and bishops throughout the region. It also reflected an evolution in church teaching—for example, on salvation, which was

ture. He started in 1980 with 135 head of cattle, in the expectation of doubling his herd within a year (which he did). Thompson did not come to the Amazon because he was hungry. His father was a wealthy man, once the nation's Minister of Agriculture. But Thompson, now 39, is convinced of several things:

now conceived in social as well as personal terms.

In its new role as champion of the downtrodden, the Brazilian church, whose once-strong influence within the government and among the middle class began to erode during the 1950s, has recouped a measure of power, prestige, and national visibility. It has done so not only through the outspoken stands its ministers have taken from the pulpit but also, at a more basic level, via creation of small, local organizations known as *comunidades de base* (CEBs).

In private houses, barns, or village halls, the CEB participants (usually about 15 to 35 poor villagers or slum-dwellers) meet with a priest or a trained layman. They are generally so used to poverty and powerlessness that they have never seriously entertained the possibility of bettering their lot. The CEBs try to get such people, as one group leader in Pernambuco explained it, to "see with their own eyes, think with their own heads, speak with their own mouths, and walk with their own feet." While Brazil's 80,000 CEBs are primarily religious in orientation (centered on scripture study), communal attempts to relate the Gospel to daily life have led to active protest by CEB members against unemployment, declining real wages, slum conditions, and other social and economic ills. Here and there, clinics and housing projects have been established. Lawyers have been hired to fight evictions. Electricity has been brought to some urban shantytowns.

The church's effort to turn its energies to the "struggle against everything that degrades and oppresses man" has been substantial but not uniform. At the top, among the leadership of the bishops' conference, a new cohesion is evident. Yet not all the leaders of Brazil's 200 ecclesiastical jurisdictions share the same zeal.

While São Paulo's Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns has become a national figure—denouncing economic "growthsmanship," providing sanctuary to active critics of the regime, and encouraging development of the CEBs—his counterparts in some of the other prosperous dioceses of the south pursue more traditional ministries. Thousands of the needy, all over the country, continue to convert to Protestant Pentecostal sects; as many as 20 to 30 million more have some sort of contact with Afro-Brazilian spiritist cults such as Umbanda.

that "sometimes you must abdicate the comforts of civilization to achieve something worthy"; that eventually he will make money from his ranch; that the Amazon is the future. He cannot understand why every young person in Brazil is not there, too.

With the small farmers who slog along BR-364 and the entrepreneurs like Thompson and the big ranchers who fly in and out by private jet, there come young professionals with a middle-class, technocratic vision of the Amazon.

At the huge government projects—the Tucuruí hydroelectric dam, the Carajás mineral complex, the Trombetas bauxite mine—there are platoons of young engineers who endure all-male, no-alcohol, bunkhouse living for a chance at responsibility. "I am doing things here that would take me 15 more years to achieve in the south," said a 29-year-old engineer, Helio Siqueira, as he stood on the pilot ore-crusher he had helped build at Carajás. "I am not an apprentice. I am the boss."

The *Programa Grande Carajás*, centered on vast iron ore deposits, is doubtless the most ambitious development project in the world, with a projected cost of $60 billion by the year 2000. Plans call not only for extensive mining (a 550-mile railroad is under construction to transport minerals from the interior to the Atlantic port city of São Luís) but also for the building of seven major industrial centers for producing steel, aluminum, and copper; the construction of a series of hydroelectric dams along the Tocantins River system; and the clearing of millions of acres for farming and ranching. Altogether, an area the size of California is involved. The government itself is building the iron ore complex and the Tucuruí Dam, but the rest of the effort is in the hands of private corporations and entrepreneurs, with Brasília's technocrats providing general guidelines and tax incentives.

Bounty Hunters

There is one key aspect of the Amazon's development that would surely have troubled Frederick Jackson Turner. Much of his thinking about the impact of the American frontier revolved around the fact that the new land was free. The Homestead Act of 1862 guaranteed that any American who wanted land could have it—160 acres—so long as he worked it. Brazil never passed a Homestead Act; much of the land in the Amazon has a price tag. Titles are often murky and frequently are based on land grants made several centuries ago by the Portuguese crown. A common way of acquiring ownership is by recourse to *grileiros*, specialists in fabricated deeds and forged signatures.

Squatters, by law, own *terra devoluta*, or public land, after occupying it for a year and a day. They can also claim land that is already owned if the titleholder does not tend it for 10 years. But their claims are vulnerable to official corruption and contradictory regulations. In addition to scores of thousands of Indians whose tribal lands lay in the path of development, hundreds of squatters—perhaps more—have paid for their land with their lives, victims of bounty hunters employed by the wealthier ranchers and farmers on whose land they have settled.

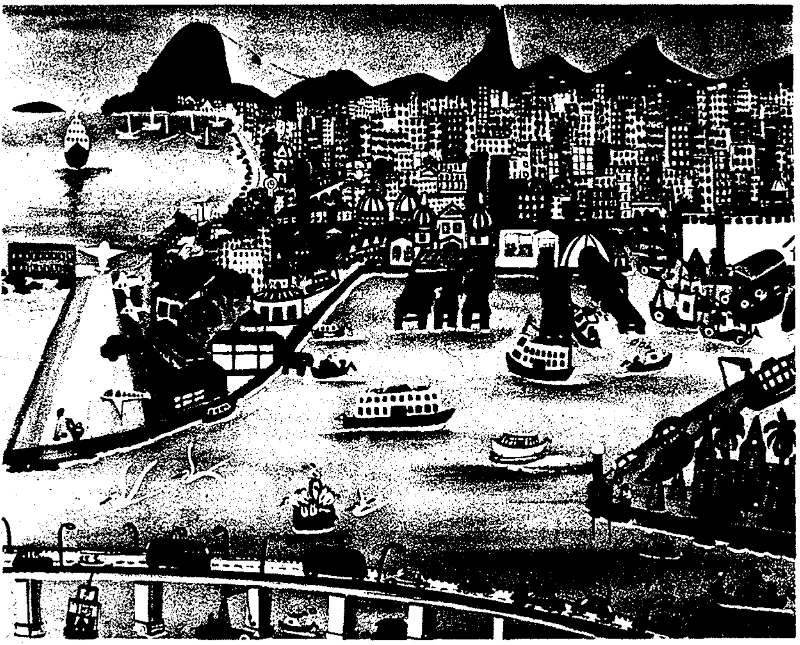
One surviving squatter is Hamilton Perreira, a 20-year-old working a small farm in the eastern Amazon with his four older brothers. He knows that his chances of turning 21 are anything but certain. "There's a $500 bounty on my head," he explained, "and someone is going to come for it." The rugged, blond-haired man held his 18-year-old wife, Rosa, in one arm, leaning with the other on the muzzle of an old .22-caliber rifle. The late-afternoon sun radiated in shafts through the palm fronds roofing his damp, high-ceilinged shack 30 miles outside the town of Xinguara.

The Perreira clan, never part of any government settlement plan, had ventured from the dry Northeast to look for a new life. Instead, they found themselves battling a cattle rancher who claimed he owned the land they were trying to cultivate. He announced his intention to kill them if they didn't leave, and hired gunmen to do the deed. The Perreira brothers, along with some other squatters, killed four of the *pistoleiros* in an ambush. The Perreiras ask the question that Serra Pelada gold only begins to answer: Does the little man really have a chance in the Amazon, and what will happen to Brazil if he doesn't?

Squandering the Forest

Haste in developing the Amazon has led to waste on a grand scale. The Trans-Amazon Highway, for example, one of the great engineering projects of modern times, was conceived and planned in 10 days, after President Emílio Garrastazú Médici toured the Northeast during a particularly harsh drought in 1970. He was appalled by the squalor and famine. "Men with no land to land with no men," he announced in a ringing speech calling for a highway to help populate the jungle with pioneering *nordestinos.*

The east-west highway was built, but it failed dismally to meet the aims of its builders. One hundred thousand families were to have moved along it within five years, but only 8,000 actually did so. Secondary roads, especially access roads leading to the new *agrovilas,* were badly maintained. Technical advisers, ignorant or disdainful of the relatively efficient patchwork farming methods of local peasants (*caboclos*) and Indians, promoted inappropriate management techniques and inappropriate crops. Indeed, the government's policy was to get the



Panorama of Rio de Janeiro, by Lia Mittarakis. Three out of five Brazilians today live in cities (versus one out of four in 1920). Many of today's urban-dwellers were driven from the countryside by increased mechanization of agriculture and a sometimes feudal system of land ownership.

Indians out of the way, not to learn from them. Many of these people had their first contact with the 20th century when the Trans-Amazon Highway passed through their lands. Some 45 percent of the Parakânan Indian tribe were dead of disease within months of the highway's intrusion, threatening to join the other 80 Brazilian tribes known to have become extinct during this century. Surviving Indians are now thought to number no more than 200,000, compared with as many as three million at the turn of the century.

Lack of proper research—the Brazilian government had stated plainly in 1972 that "development should not be negatively affected by sometimes exaggerated concern for the preservation of the environment"—took a heavy toll. Despite the lush impression of fertility that a rain forest presents, jungle soils in fact are extremely thin, complex, and delicate, and they vary in composition from one acre to the next. Up to 90 percent of the nutrients in a tropical forest may be concentrated in the trees themselves, while in temperate climes, up to 90 percent will be concentrated in the soil. Thus, the ashes from slash-and-burn clearing may enrich the earth, but only temporarily. Not knowing how to identify arable soils—and there are many of them in the Amazon Basin, amounting to perhaps 20 percent of its area—small farmers along the highway found their fields quickly exhausted, and moved on from one plot to the next.

The government abandoned the new settlers along the Trans-Amazon Highway when they failed to produce or maintain satisfactory harvests. The push was declared a failure, and thousands of families were left along the roadside to watch the jungle creep back over their neatly planned villages. There is a monument in the Trans-Amazon Highway town of Presidente Médici (est. 1974) where a plaque on a stone plinth proclaims that the Brazilian people have responded to "the challenge of history, occupying the heart of Amazonia." Today, the town is nearly deserted, and the flagpoles encircling the plaque, one for each of the states of Brazil, are perpetually bare.

Buying a Dream

Along with the big failures, the Amazon has its own sense of parody. The pioneers in dusty towns such as Rio Maria and Redencao have seen the cowboy movies ("bangy-bangys," they are called) and know how to act. The military police assigned to duty in the "Far Oeste" wear their pistol holsters slung low, like John Wayne in *Red River*. The supervisor of a slaughterhouse in Campo Alegre, looking over a roomful of his workers, solemnly told some American visitors, "These are the same people who conquered your Wild West"—and then put a videotape of a Randolph Scott movie in the Betamax and bellied up to the bar for another martini.

Yet, if they are fooling themselves, the Brazilians in the Amazon may never know it. They share a combination of hope and nationalism that stems more from pride than from arrogance; a willingness to make their *own* mistakes. This attitude was something that the shipping magnate Daniel K. Ludwig, perhaps America's richest man, discovered the hard way.

Beginning in 1967, the reclusive Ludwig, now 86, invested $1 billion in a Connecticut-sized Amazon plantation. Ludwig wanted to show the world how to use the tropics. Foreseeing an international pulp shortage, he replaced mixed stands of native trees with a fast-maturing Asian import, the gmelina tree, in a headstrong and risky attempt at timber monoculture. He also towed a 17-story floating pulp mill across the Pacific from Japan and then up the Amazon to the Jarí River. With 6,600 workers, Ludwig's Jarí Project was the largest private employer in the Amazon.

But as Brazil's military regime, led by General Ernesto Geisel, began to loosen curbs on political activity and free speech during the late 1970s, one of the first things Brazilians chose to protest was the presence of the rich American on four million acres of their jungle. There were rumors (unfounded) of slavery. Critics denounced his efforts as an "American invasion of Brazil." Brazil could tame the Amazon by itself, they said. In 1982, the Jarí Project, still operating at a loss, was sold for $280 million to a consortium of 22 Brazilian companies. The transaction was orchestrated by the Brazilian government.

Yet the evidence suggests that Brazil cannot afford to lose the Ludwigs. Brazilians have much of the technology but not enough of the money it will take to develop the Amazon. The government has already obtained German, Japanese, and World Bank financing to develop the iron ore complex at Carajás, and more will be needed. The Brazilian people have demonstrated their determination to conquer the Amazon. They have created a new agricultural frontier—though who, ultimately, will own the land remains in question—and begun to exploit the region's mineral wealth. Railroads and highways and airfields are in place. From what has already been achieved there will be no retreat. But if development is to go forward, Brazil must convince the world to buy the Amazon dream. Perhaps it can.

During the height of the rainy season in 1981, the gold mine at Serra Pelada collapsed. The walls gave way and slipped into the pit, leaving a wide, shallow mudhole. All the miners departed. It seemed a bad end to such a hopeful symbol.

But in March of last year, Serra Pelada was reopened. Rumors of the discovery of a 16.5-pound nugget of gold, worth $100,000, became world news this time. It was the biggest sign yet, for a nation that believes in signs, of the treasure that is still there for the taking.