

A NEW LOOK AT LATIN AMERICA — FOIA b3b

How Bright the Future

Interview With Dr. Preston James,
Professor of Geography, Syracuse University

CPYRGHT

When a trained geographer reports on Latin America you get a new insight into the problems of that vast and troubled expanse.

Why hasn't Latin America developed into a modern duplicate of the United States?

Does it have the raw materials, the land fertility, other resources needed for greatness?

What's wrong? The people? The weather? The system? Why do countries to the south continue to stumble from one crisis to another?

Dr. Preston James, prominent geographer and specialist on Latin America, answers in this interview with "U. S. News & World Report" staff members in the magazine's conference room.

Q Professor James, when you look at Latin America as a geographer, what is it that you see there?

A When a geographer talks of "Latin America" he refers to that part of the Western Hemisphere that lies south of the United States, beginning with Mexico and including the Antilles—all of this is part of Latin America.

You certainly wouldn't argue over the fact that a lot of the people there are not Latin. You just accept this as a fact. There are large populations in this diverse area, as you know, that don't even speak a Latin language. In five of the countries a majority of the people are Indian. The Indians in Peru and Bolivia and Ecuador have many ways of living that descend directly from the ancient Andean civilization.

On the other hand, one country, Haiti, not only talks French, but is Negro with African tradition and mixed with the French culture. Jamaica is Negro but talks English. Trinidad is English and it has an amazing mixture of Hindu and Negro and white people of British descent.

Q What is Cuba?

A Well, Cuba is mostly Spanish with some mixture of Indian and Negro. The countries with a large proportion of the population of Indian ancestry include Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

None of the other countries has such a large proportion of people who are directly descended from Indians, racially.

Q Are there predominantly white countries down there?

A Argentina and Uruguay are 90 per cent white European and so also is Southern Brazil—from São Paulo on southward.

Q What about the north of Brazil?

A To the north—my heavens what a mixture of races! A mixture of Negro, Indian and white. And, don't forget, when you say "pure Portuguese," you've got to put quotes on it, because these people were mixed up with many ingredients before they left Portugal. Negro slavery was an institution that was well known in Lisbon at the time of Prince Henry, in the fifteenth century.

Q How large a part of the earth is Latin America?

A Well, it makes up 15 per cent of the world's inhabited land area. That is, you leave out Antarctica because we assume nobody lives there. But taking the inhabited lands of the world, about 15 per cent is in Latin America.

Q How does that compare with the United States?

A Anglo-America, including the U. S. and Canada, is about the same size, and in 1956 had the same population.

Q How does it compare with Africa?

A Africa south of the Sahara is also about the same size. The point that you need to add to the figure for Latin America's size is that it has only 7 per cent of the world's people, so that there are large areas that are literally empty.

On the other hand, there is no other major region in the world which is growing more rapidly than Latin America in population. Between 1920 and 1950 population increased 80 per cent. The rate of increase is something like 2½ per cent each year.

Q Is that faster than in other parts of the world?

A No other part of the world is increasing at so fast a rate.

Q Are the economies of Latin American countries increasing as rapidly as the population?

A It is dangerous to generalize about this because some are not. For a while, Brazil's economic growth was ahead of its population increase. Now it has slipped back. The economies of many of these countries are not keeping pace with population growth. If you take the economy of Latin America as a whole, it is not keeping pace with the population growth.

Q Do they have the resources, if developed, with which to support a much greater population?

A There's no question but that they have resources in potentially great abundance. The resources, you remember, are put to use by human technology.

Q Yes, but are resources of Latin America located where they can be readily developed?

A That's the point. The resources often are located in the wrong places in Latin America, which simply means that it's more costly to develop them.