

INTRODUCING Middle and South America



Fifteenth-century plaster carving from a monastery in Oaxaca, Mexico

Geographic DICTIONARY

- **isthmus**
- **indigenous**
- **pampas**
- **llanos**
- **indigo**
- **mestizo**
- **mulatto**
- **cacao**
- **hacienda**
- **labor intensive**
- **shantytown**
- **land reform**

Geographers have used cultural and historical geography to define a region called Middle America. Middle America includes Mexico, the seven countries of Central America, and the many islands of the Caribbean Sea. The region also includes the Isthmus of Panama, which links North America to South America. An **isthmus** is a narrow neck of land that acts as a bridge to connect two larger bodies of land.

Middle America is one of the most culturally diverse regions in the world. Though the Caribbean islands were originally inhabited by **indigenous** (native) peoples and later colonized by European countries, millions of African slaves were transported to the Caribbean to work its sugar plantations. As a result, the major cultural influence is African.

South America extends from the warm and sunny beaches of Point Gallinas in Colombia to the cold and stormy seas around Cape Horn, about 4,500 miles (7,241 km) to the south. Its peoples are as diverse as its physical geography. The region's architecture, laws, languages, and religion are lasting reminders of Europe's colonial rule of South America.

Ancient Mayan pyramid in southern Mexico





Physical Geography

FOCUS

- ◆ How were the various landforms of Middle and South America created?
- ◆ What climate types and what rivers are found in Middle and South America?

REGION

Landforms

According to the theory of plate tectonics, South America and Africa broke apart from Gondwanaland more than 100 million years ago. As South America moved westward, other continental pieces from the Pacific region collided with the west coast. These collisions may have formed the first Andes Mountains. A few million years ago, South America began to ride up over the Nazca plate under the southeastern Pacific Ocean. Since this first collision, the Andes have continued to build as the result of folding, faulting, and volcanic activity. The other mountains of South America are the Guiana (gee-AN-uh) Highlands and the highlands of eastern Brazil. These highlands are older and more eroded than the Andes.

Plains cover most of South America. The largest plains are in the Amazon River basin. The other large plains are the **pampas** of Argentina and the **llanos** (YAHN-ohz) of Colombia and Venezuela. These plains are the result of erosion steadily smoothing the land's surface over millions of years.

The theory of plate tectonics also explains the creation of islands around the Caribbean Sea. As the South American plate drifted westward from Africa, the smaller Caribbean plate cruised eastward. This Caribbean plate carried only a few continental pieces. These pieces became the mountainous islands of the Greater Antilles—Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico. At the eastern edge of the Caribbean plate was a chain of volcanic islands—the Lesser Antilles.

Central America and Mexico are believed to have been formed from a jumble of small plates attached to the rim of the North American and Caribbean plates. Mexico consists mostly of a high central plateau with mountains along each side. Central America has many short mountain ranges and huge volcanoes. These mountains and an ocean trench off the Pacific coast of southern Mexico and Central America indicate a continuing plate collision. Scientists believe that Central



The Andes Mountains in **Peru** rise around farmers winnowing wheat, separating the grains from their

husks. Although they live near the equator, people in elevated areas of this region dress for the cooler highland climates of the Andes.

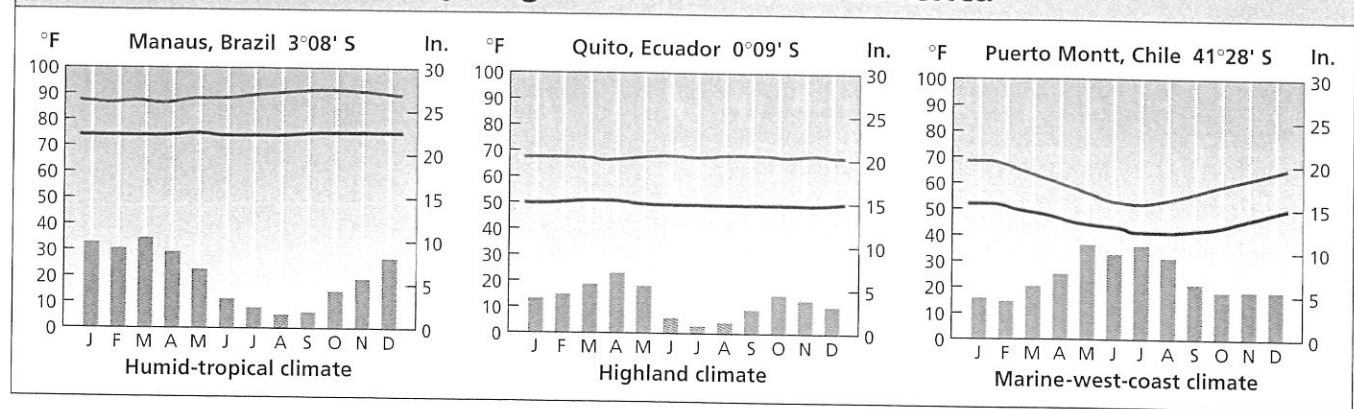
America and South America became connected only a few million years ago. Earthquakes and volcanoes are a constant threat throughout Middle America and the western side of South America.

Climate Because the region of Middle and South America extends across nearly 90 degrees of latitude, it includes a full range of middle-latitude as well as tropical climate regions. South America contains the largest humid-tropical region in the world—the huge forested area centered on the Amazon River. Rain falls here almost every day. The region's other areas of humid-tropical climate are along the eastern coasts where the moist trade winds move on shore.

Many areas of Middle and South America experience wet summers and dry winters typical of the tropical-savanna climate. The many areas of dry forests on the Caribbean islands and the Pacific coast of Central America have a similar climate.

Southern South America has a variety of middle-latitude climates. Far southern Chile is influenced by the westerlies. The climate found here is cool and wet, similar to that of the United States' Pacific Northwest. Snow and rainfall are particularly heavy in the southern Andes. East of the Andes in southern Argentina, however, the mountains block moisture from reaching the area.

Graphing Climate in South America



SKILL STUDY The first two climographs above show the effects of the Andes Mountains on climates in South America. To learn how to read climographs, see page S11 of the Skills Handbook. Although both are located near the equator, the humid-tropical climate of Manaus, Brazil, is

much warmer and moister than the highland climate of Quito, Ecuador. The Ecuadorean capital is located in the higher elevations of the Andes Mountains. **Other than having cooler temperatures, what is the weather of Puerto Montt, Chile, like during the winter?**

As a result, semiarid steppe and desert climates are found. Farther north, the central valley of Chile has a Mediterranean climate, with winter rains and summer droughts. A large region with humid-subtropical climates is found in northeastern Argentina and southern Brazil.

The driest region of Middle and South America includes the Atacama Desert of northern Chile and the nearby coastal deserts of Peru and southern Ecuador. Subtropical high pressure brings dry weather to these areas all year. Because the high Andes block moisture from the east, the western slopes of the mountains are very dry.

The mild climates on mountain slopes between the elevations of 3,000 and 6,000 feet (914 and 1,829 m) are particularly important in tropical Middle and South America. The mountain valleys have fertile soils and water from mountain streams. These pleasant environments are some of the densest areas of settlement in the region.

The pattern of the highland climates of the region is important in understanding population distribution in the region. (See the maps on pages 190 and 191.) This climate pattern can be seen from the mountains of Mexico and Central America through the Andes of South America. You know that temperatures become cooler at higher elevations. For this reason, the region's highland climates have been divided into elevation zones along mountain slopes. Geographers are able to study how population distributions and ways of

life relate to these climate patterns. You will learn more about these elevation zones in Chapter 20.

River Systems There are three major river systems that drain the eastern side of South America: the Amazon, the Paraná, and the Orinoco. Beginning on the eastern side of the Andes, the Amazon River stretches more than 4,000 miles (6,436 km) before it reaches the Atlantic Ocean. Curiously, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins are linked. (See the map on page 189.) The Río Negro, which flows mainly south into the Amazon, has an upper tributary that flows north into the Orinoco during part of the year. Farther south, the Paraná River system empties into the Río de la Plata estuary, located between Argentina and Uruguay. The headwaters of the Paraná River system are located in the highlands of eastern Brazil and in western Argentina along the eastern slopes of the Andes.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. What forces created the different mountain ranges of Middle and South America?
2. Why does the region of Middle and South America have several climate types, and what are they? What are the region's major river systems?
3. **Critical Thinking Imagine** a country in Middle America experiences a severe earthquake. How might the physical geography of the region affect that country's ability to respond?



Historical Geography

FOCUS

- ◆ What Native American civilizations existed in Middle and South America before the arrival of Europeans in the region?
- ◆ How did European colonization affect the region's land and peoples? What effects did independence have?

Settlement Patterns By the time Christopher Columbus first arrived in the Americas, Native Americans had lived in the region for thousands of years. Columbus thought he had reached the islands off the coast of India. He called the indigenous peoples he found living there "Indios," or Indians. Columbus actually had landed on an island in the Bahamas, southeast of Florida. He claimed the island for Spain and named it San Salvador (Holy Savior). Emigration from Spain was encouraged, and by the mid-1500s, there were

thousands of Spanish colonists on the larger Caribbean islands.

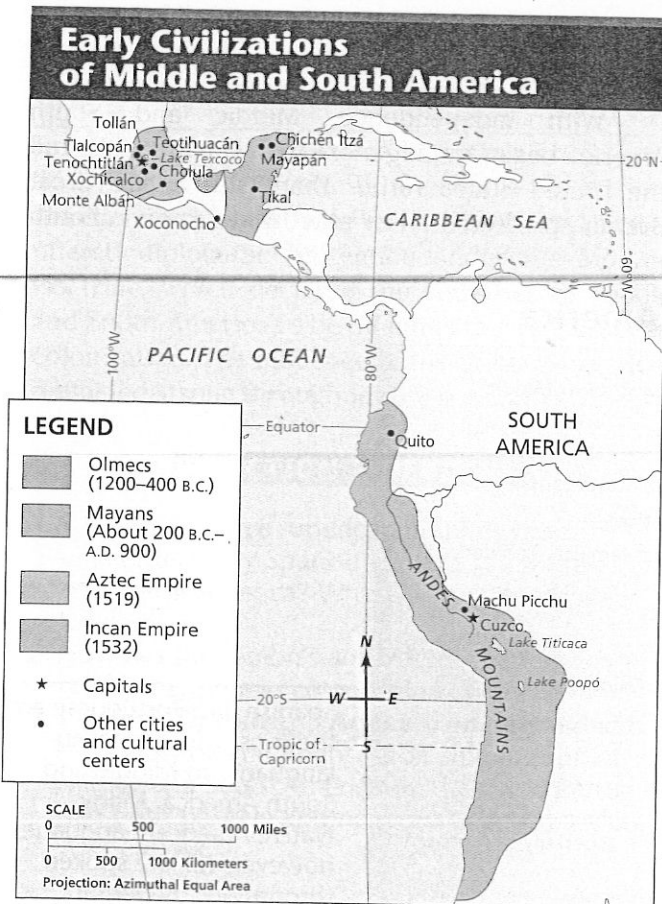
Most Native Americans were farmers and hunters who lived in small villages. Some groups traded salt, shells, and other goods with their neighbors. There were also, however, great Native American civilizations that built impressive monuments and large cities housing tens of thousands of people.

The ancient Olmecs thrived in eastern and southeastern Mexico from about 1200 B.C. to about 400 B.C. They developed extensive trade and were the first people to build religious pyramids, greatly influencing later Middle American cultures.

The Mayas, considered one of the most advanced Native American cultures, flourished between about 200 B.C. and A.D. 900. Ruins of once brilliant Mayan cities now lie in the forests of Guatemala, Honduras, and the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico and Belize. Sophisticated Native American societies also flourished elsewhere on the mainland of Middle America and in northern South America.

At the time the Spanish arrived on the continents, there existed two monument-building civilizations. The empires of the Aztecs in central Mexico and of the Incas in western South America developed about A.D. 1400 and continued the achievements of earlier civilizations. The Aztec Empire was centered at Tenochtitlán (tay-nawch-tee-TLAHN) on the present site of Mexico City. Tenochtitlán and the Aztec Empire were conquered in 1521 by the Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés (kawr-TEHZ). The Incan Empire extended along the Andes Mountains from Ecuador to Chile.

Many factors contributed to the decline of Native American civilizations. The Europeans, with guns and armor, had a technological advantage in warfare. Furthermore, diseases that the Europeans brought with them, such as smallpox and measles, were devastating to the Native



MAP STUDY

Historical maps are important tools for understanding earlier times. Some historical maps identify earlier civilizations, major cities, and important events. This map shows the location and dates of civilizations in Middle and South America before European colonization. Which civilization dominated western South America at the time the Spanish reached the region in the first decades of the sixteenth century?

Americans. When Cortés arrived in the Valley of Mexico, perhaps three-quarters of the Aztec people were ill. Diseases from Europe eventually killed millions of Native Americans.

European Colonization By the late fifteenth century, Spain and Portugal were rich and powerful. Both countries were eager for the profits possible by having overseas empires. A treaty in 1494 divided the Western Hemisphere into Spanish and Portuguese territories. Portugal received a large triangle of eastern South America, including present-day Brazil.

Spanish and Portuguese colonists quickly settled the region. They extended the Native Americans' gold and silver mines and opened new ones. Ranching and farming were the key economic activities, however. The colonists brought with them European crops, livestock, and farming methods. They also adapted Native American crops, such as maize (corn), beans, and potatoes, to their needs. Spanish colonists were awarded large land grants by the Spanish king. Native Americans living on this land were forced to work the farms and ranches. The idea that land could be owned was new to the indigenous peoples.

By the mid-1600s, the French, British, and Dutch began to acquire lands that the Spanish had not colonized. These included the smaller islands of the Caribbean, as well as Jamaica and Haiti. Their only mainland settlements were British Honduras (now Belize), British Guiana (now Guyana), French Guiana, and Suriname (soohr-uh-

NAMH-uh). These colonies were all based on plantation agriculture. Major plantation crops were sugarcane and **indigo**. Indigo is a plant used to make a blue dye. Later, bananas became a key plantation crop. For more than two centuries, African slaves provided most of the labor for the plantations. When slavery ended, the British imported field workers from India, while the Dutch brought in Indonesians.

Because there were few women among the colonists, European settlers often married Native American or African women. Many Middle and South Americans are **mestizos**, or people with both Native American and European ancestors. The descendants of European plantation colonists and Africans are known as **mulattos**. Today, the geography of the peoples, languages, and cultures in the region is mostly a result of the process of colonization.

Independence By 1800, ideas of independence introduced by the American and French revolutions were well known throughout Middle and South America. Between 1808 and 1825, many colonies gained independence. Yet, the economies and societies of the various countries usually changed little. Rich landowners, merchants, and military generals merely replaced the colonial government. The lives of rural peoples remained much the same.

With independence, Middle and South America began trading more with Great Britain and the United States rather than with Spain. Great Britain protected the new Middle and South

Languages of Middle and South America

<i>Spanish</i>	▶	Mexico, Argentina, most other countries of Middle and South America
<i>Portuguese</i>	▶	Brazil
<i>French</i>	▶	Haiti, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique
<i>Dutch</i>	▶	Suriname, Aruba, Netherlands Antilles
<i>English</i>	▶	Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, other Caribbean territories
<i>Native American</i>	▶	<i>Nahuatl</i> ▶ Mexico, El Salvador
		<i>Quiché</i> ▶ Guatemala
		<i>Quechua</i> ▶ Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Colombia
		<i>Aymara</i> ▶ Bolivia, Peru
		<i>Guaraní</i> ▶ Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil

NOTE: Nahuatl, Quiché, Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní are only five of the many Native American languages and dialects spoken in Middle and South America, especially in southern Mexico, Central America, and Andean South America.

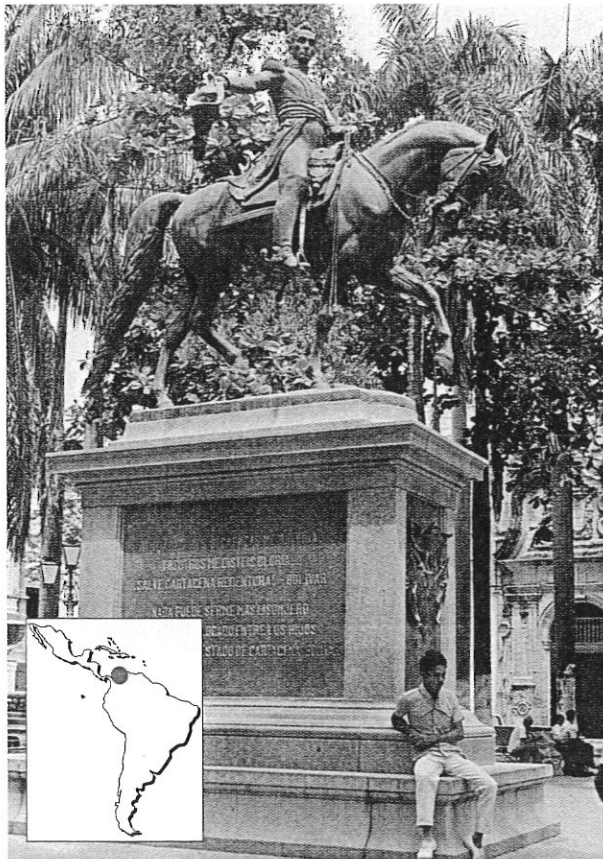
Spanish and Portuguese are the most widely spoken languages in Middle and South America. Many Native American languages, however, still are spoken throughout the region.



Economic Geography

FOCUS

- ◆ What natural resources and industries are important to the economies of the region's countries?
- ◆ What forms of agriculture are common in Middle and South America today?



This statue in **Cartagena, Colombia**, honors Simón Bolívar for his role in leading South America's fight for independence. Statues of Bolívar, who is called *El Libertador* (The Liberator) by some South Americans, can be found in cities throughout the continent.

American states with its navy. The United States offered diplomatic protection under the Monroe Doctrine, which declared the countries of Middle and South America to be off-limits to new European colonization. The influence of the United States has remained strong throughout the region.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

1. What two Native American empires were encountered by Spanish explorers in Middle and South America? Where was each empire located?
2. How did the region's agriculture change as a result of European colonization?
3. **Critical Thinking** **Agree or disagree** with the following statement: "The colonization of Middle and South America by Spain and Portugal had both positive and negative effects." Support your answer.

Natural Resources The countries of Middle and South America have rich mineral deposits, fertile soils, and climates suitable for growing many different crops. Dams on many rivers provide irrigation water and generate electricity. Several countries also have forest and fish resources.

The mineral wealth that attracted the Spanish to the region centuries ago is still being developed. Gold and silver deposits have been found in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. Metals such as copper are being mined in parts of the Andes, in central Brazil, and in Mexico's mountains. Brazil has enormous iron-ore reserves. Bauxite, the ore of aluminum, is widely available in northeastern South America and in Jamaica.

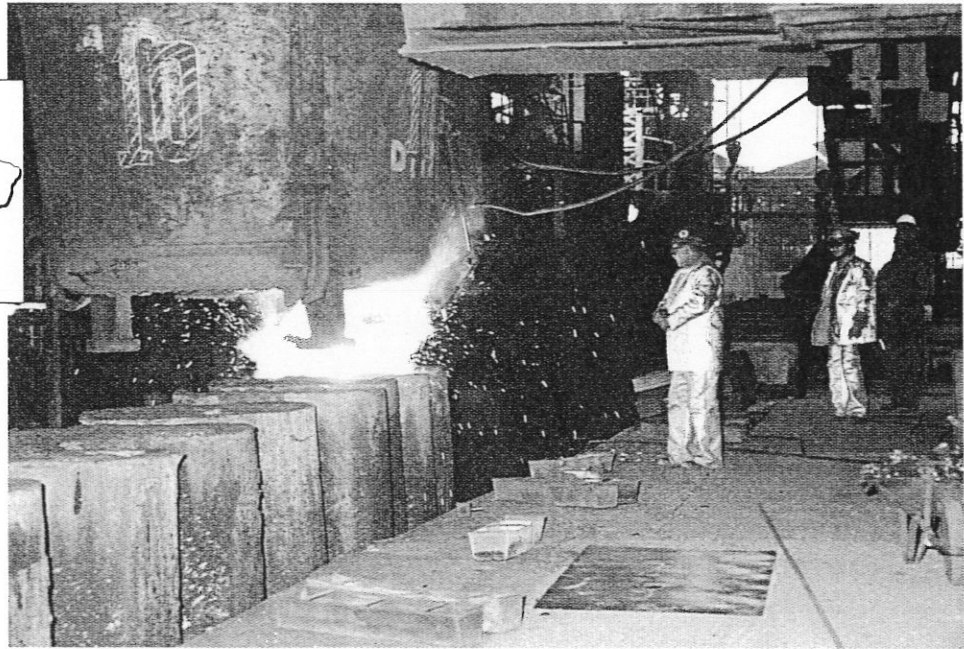
Petroleum is found in many countries of Middle and South America as well. The greatest oil reserves are in Mexico and Venezuela. Oil deposits also have been developed in the upper Amazon Basin. More recent oil discoveries have been made off the coasts of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile.

Agriculture Several types of agriculture are practiced in Middle and South America today. Subsistence agriculture remains common in many remote areas, such as in inland forests and in the mountains. Subsistence farmers often live in small villages. Each day, these farmers walk from their homes to nearby fields.

In contrast, modern commercial agriculture, or agribusiness, uses the latest farming methods and mechanized equipment. Farm products are processed and exported to international markets. Areas with agribusiness are generally prosperous agricultural regions. Commercial farming is well developed in southern Brazil and southward to the pampas of Argentina, in the central valley of Chile, and in northern Mexico. Fruits and vegetables from each of these regions can be bought in stores throughout the United States.



Manufacturing jobs, such as those provided by this steel plant in **Monterrey, Mexico**, attract many people to urban areas throughout Middle and South America. The pace of economic growth must increase to catch up with the region's soaring population growth.



Today, plantation agriculture is a form of modern commercial agriculture. It is practiced on many Caribbean islands and along the region's humid coasts. Most plantation products, including sugar, bananas, and **cacao**, are exported to developed countries. Cacao is a small tree on which the cocoa bean grows. The cocoa bean is used in making chocolate. (See pages 448–449.) Modern-day plantations usually are part of large, foreign-owned corporations.

Another form of agriculture common in Middle and South America is the **hacienda** system. Introduced by the Spanish, haciendas are large family-owned estates. Peasants live on these estates and have small plots on which to grow their own crops. In return for these plots and services granted by the landowner, the peasants also must work the owner's land as a form of payment. More symbols of the landowners' social status than profit-making operations, haciendas are often unproductive. Even so, they remain a basic form of land organization in much of the region.

Industry As manufacturing increases in Middle and South America, the number of jobs in urban areas also increases. The largest industrial region is located in an arc of cities that extends from Rio de Janeiro in southeastern Brazil to Buenos Aires (bway-nuhs AR-eez) in eastern Argentina. Most capital cities of Middle and South America have developed into industrial regions.

Most Middle and South American factories produce food items, consumer goods, or building materials for local markets. Automobiles, trucks, and railway cars are produced in the larger countries. Industries that manufacture export products are often **labor intensive**. That is, they require a large work force. Often assembled by hand, export products include clothing, furniture, and small appliances. While these labor-intensive industries provide jobs and the training that may lead to better jobs, factory workers often face a life of hard work with little reward.

Tourism is a growing industry in the region, particularly in the islands of the Caribbean. The income generated from tourism is important to many countries' economies. However, the benefits of the tourist industry to local island communities are sometimes less than expected. This is because workers at the region's hotels and resorts generally receive low pay.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

1. List four natural resources and four industries found in Middle and South America.
2. Compare and contrast plantations and haciendas.
3. **Critical Thinking Determine** which forms of agriculture are labor intensive, and explain your answer.



4 Regional Issues

FOCUS

- ◆ *How are economics and politics linked in the region?*
- ◆ *How do countries outside the region affect countries in the region? How do countries in the region affect countries outside the region?*

REGION

Population Issues Middle and South America are experiencing rapid population growth. If current growth rates continue, many countries will double their populations in 20 to 30 years. Building schools and roads as well as creating jobs for this increasing number of people will be difficult.

Rapid population growth often leads to increased migration from poor rural areas to cities. Rural migrants come to the cities seeking jobs and a better life. Most migrants find housing in the **shantytowns** that form the large slums

Economic progress, especially in the developing nations of the world, often has proceeded at the expense of the environment. For example, large parts of the Amazon rain forests, such as here in **Brazil**, have been burned and cleared. Developers want to use the cleared land for farming and grazing.

surrounding many Middle and South American cities. A shantytown is a poor settlement of small makeshift shelters. City services such as water and waste disposal are not available, and most roads are unpaved.

Even in the richest countries of Middle and South America, there are many poor people. Middle and South America contain sharp economic and social contrasts. Lack of economic development has contributed to political instability in the region.

Political Issues While much of Middle and South America today is democratic, most countries have histories of repeated changes in government. Typically, different groups within the wealthy families and the military have battled for control of a country's government. Changes in

government usually have been minor and have done little for most of the country's people. Wealth and land often remain in the hands of the fortunate few.

Political instability may be lessened in Middle and South America by **land reform**. Land reform means breaking up the large landholdings and allowing small farmers to own their own land. For generations, farmers have worked for shares of the crops they produced or for low wages on lands that were part of plantations and haciendas. These large landholdings usually have been owned by powerful people. Though land reform has been slow in many countries, it became widespread in Mexico after the 1910 Mexican Revolution.

Economic Issues At times, citizens become angry at the policies pursued by their national government. Often, money that was supposed to aid development of a poor region goes to meet less important needs in a wealthier capital city. Also, many people in Middle and South America believe that their countries are not truly independent. These people think that there is too much foreign investment and control.

Foreign governments and banks, trying to encourage development, lent a great deal of money to various countries in the region during economic boom years in past decades. These loans, however, have caused almost as many problems as they have solved. The borrowing countries now have difficulty paying back the loans. As a result, many Middle and South American countries have large debts. These debts have made further economic development even more difficult.

Although multinational corporations from the United States, Europe, and Japan provide investments and technology, these companies have been accused of interfering in local politics and of exploiting local resources. Today, most countries in the region have a cautious attitude toward foreign corporations. Tax laws encourage multinational corporations to share ownership and profits with the local communities.

The region also shares some economic challenges with other regions of the world. For example, cutting the rain forests for lumber, or clearing them for farmland, provides an important source of income for many people in Central America and Brazil. As in other regions of the

world, this widespread deforestation has led to losses of both plant and animal species. In addition, deforestation may be leaving homeless some indigenous peoples who live in the rain forests.

An important regional issue with global consequences is the growing and trafficking of illegal drugs. Illegal drugs carry a high price. Many Middle and South American farmers find that they can earn more money by growing crops used for drugs than they can from growing other kinds of crops. Likewise, people who are willing to trade these drugs among countries often can make large profits. The large illegal-drug markets in the United States and Europe often are the final destinations for these dangerous products. In some countries, such as Colombia, attempts to stop the illegal-drug trade have led to the killing of government officials and other violence.

REGION Regional Cooperation In an effort to promote increased regional cooperation, almost all of the countries of Middle and South America, with the United States, formed the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948. The goals of the OAS include keeping peace and increasing security in the Western Hemisphere, settling disputes among member nations, and promoting economic, social, and cultural cooperation.

Some of the region's countries also have formed other organizations to promote economic cooperation with each other. Mercosur, for example, promotes trade between six southern countries of South America. Other organizations include the Central American Common Market and the Andean Group. These organizations work to lower barriers to international trade and business. They also improve communication between leaders of governments and businesses, helping reduce the potential for conflict in the region.

SECTION 4 REVIEW

1. What factors have caused political instability in some of the countries of Middle and South America? How might greater stability be achieved?
2. Using examples, discuss the international forces at work within the region.
3. **Critical Thinking Explain** why many countries in Middle and South America have large debts. Do you think that there is any solution to these "debt crises"? Why or why not?