

SOUTH AMERICA: THE COUNTRIES

INDEPENDENT NATIONS

ARGENTINA_A / BUENOS AIRES

BOLIVIA_B / LA PAZ, SUCRE

BRAZIL_C / BRASÍLIA

CHILE_D / SANTIAGO

COLOMBIA_E / BOGOTÁ

ECUADOR_F / QUITO

GUYANA_G / GEORGETOWN

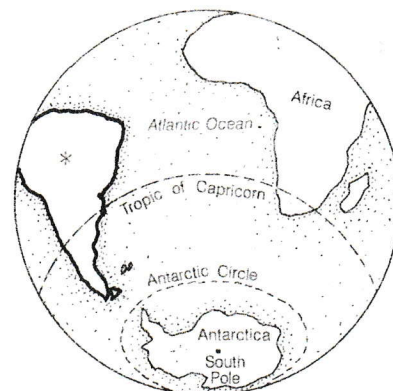
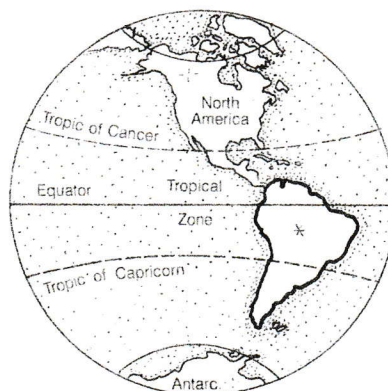
PARAGUAY_H / ASUNCIÓN

PERU_I / LIMA

SURINAME_J / PARAMARIBO

URUGUAY_K / MONTEVIDEO

VENEZUELA_L / CARACAS



South America lies almost entirely east of North America, and most of it is within the tropics. Seasonal changes south of the Equator occur at opposite times from those in the Northern Hemisphere (e.g., January is the warmest month). South America is much closer to Antarctica than any other continent.

FOREIGN POSSESSIONS

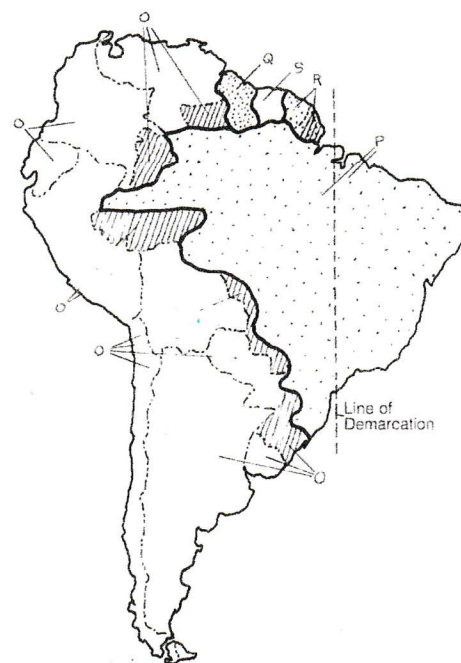
FALKLAND ISLANDS_M / STANLEY

FRENCH GUIANA_N / CAYENNE

South America, the fourth-largest continent (6,900,000 sq.mi., 17,871,000 km²), has a population of 345 million. The continent is a study in extremes: affluent cities and wretched slums; Stone Age cultures and ultra-modern urban areas; densely populated coastal areas and virtually empty interiors; rich deposits of natural resources but no practical way to access them; and the greatest disparity of all—the gulf between the extraordinary wealth of the elite and the desperate poverty of the masses.

Most of these nations are struggling with stagnant economies and overburdened by massive foreign debt, a serious problem compounded by a population explosion that is in large measure due to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church arrived shortly after the conquistadors and converted the native Indian population to the religion and culture of the European invaders. Natives were forced to work in the mines, farms, and settlements; vast numbers died in the process. Just as they destroyed the Aztec civilization in Mexico, a handful of heavily armed Spaniards conquered the flourishing 500-year-old Inca civilization. Descendants of the Incas are still the majority in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. The continent's earliest inhabitants are believed to have migrated from North America some 20,000 years ago. It may have taken another 10,000 years for them to reach the southern tip of the continent. Well over half of all South Americans are mestizos (of mixed Indian and European ancestry, who speak Spanish and are western oriented); mulattos (of mixed black and European backgrounds); and pure-blooded Indians and blacks. The remainder are of European descent. There were few Indians on the east coast, and they were nearly wiped out by the colonialists. Africans were imported as replacements for the decimated native population. Settlers in Argentina and Uruguay encouraged European immigration instead of resorting to slavery, and today the population in those countries is largely white. When slavery was abolished in the Guianas, and blacks left the plantations, the British and Dutch looked to India and southeast Asia for a new source of labor. Guyana and Suriname are now dominated by the descendants of those Asian indentured workers.

In the early 19th century, revolutionary fever swept the continent. European powers were too weakened by domestic wars to prevent their colonies from breaking away. New nations were formed under democratic constitutions, but the presence of actual democracies has been exceedingly rare. For nearly two centuries, extremely wealthy and influential families have been able to maintain enormous landholdings by encouraging dictatorial or military rule. Although the trend is now toward democratically elected governments, in the absence of meaningful land reform, these emerging democracies will have to contend with political unrest bred by the widespread poverty.



18TH CENTURY EUROPEAN COLONIES

SPAIN_O

PORTUGAL_P

GREAT BRITAIN_Q

FRANCE_R

NETHERLANDS_S

In 1494, two years after Columbus discovered the New World, the Pope sought to avoid future conflict by drawing the "Line of Demarcation" down what was then believed to be the center of South America. He gave Portugal the right to all lands east of the line, and Spain received everything to the west. Later, Portugal was permitted to expand the Brazilian colony westward. Neither nation wanted the swampy coast and rugged forests of the northeast. That region was later claimed by the British (Guyana), Dutch (Suriname), and French (French Guiana), none of whom respected the Pope's territorial decrees in South America—or anywhere else. The diagonal lines on the map above represent lands that Brazil would acquire from its neighbors.

