

Andrew Garber

Chapter 8 and 9 Response

World Geography

Latin America

While geography is not to blame for all of the problems in Latin America, it is undeniable that the geography of the region has played a large role in the development of the region - positive and negative. Most notable here, is the resource rich nature of the Amazon Rainforest and its surrounding areas, the geographical isolation of the Andes Mountains, and the invaluable resource of the Panama Canal.

Writing about the resource-rich nature of the Amazon Rainforest and the surrounding regions is obviously a sensitive topic at the moment, as Guyana and Venezuela are currently on the verge of a shooting war over oil - fun! Sadly, this does reinforce the point that Latin America has plentiful natural resources that could lead to a fearsome industrial base, but has never materialized due to internal corruption and poor governance, and external political and economic pressures. No discussion of Latin America's natural resources would be complete without acknowledging the impacts of colonization on the economic and political development of the region. While this is not some great manifesto in favor of dependency theory, it is important to note that the economic and political development of Latin America was stunted by the colonial powers, and that the region has never fully recovered. The colonial empires of Spain and Portugal were built on the backs of slave labor for the extraction of natural resources, and following independence, the region was still largely dependent on the export of natural resources to the industrial powers of the world. While *some* progress has been made in this area, no great industrial boom has swept the region, despite ample natural resources and population.

The geographical isolation caused by the Andes Mountain range is not the greatest factor in the economic, political, and cultural development of Latin America - but it has certainly played a role. In the economic sense, trade, people, and ideas tend to follow a *literal* path of least resistance. The Andes Mountains are not a wall, but certainly a barrier to trade and travel. In the cultural sense, this has led to a number of distinct cultures developing in the region with little historical interaction. Most interestingly (and funnily, perhaps) is the political development of the region. Chile for example, is an incredibly long and narrow country sandwiched between the sea and the Andes. This has contributed - though not solely caused - to near continuous political instability.

Finally, the Panama Canal is an invaluable resource to the region. Even though it was built by the United States under dubious circumstances, it has been a major boon the region. About 6% of the world's trade passes through the canal, and it is a major source of revenue and development for the region. In addition, the canal has proven such an important geostrategic resource that the United States has intervened in the region multiple times to ensure its continued operation.

In conclusion, Latin America has major economic potential, but has been held back by a number of factors, including geography. The region has a large population, ample natural resources, and one of the world's most critical geostrategic resources in the Panama Canal. However, the region has been held back by internal corruption and poor governance, and external political and economic pressures. Hopefully, the region can overcome these challenges and grow into a major economic power in the future for the benefit of its people and the world.

