



MAP OF LATIN AMERICAN DREAMS / MAPA DE SUEÑOS LATINOAMERICANOS



A FILM BY MARTÍN WEBER



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Map of Latin American Dreams

Between 1992 and 2013, Argentine artist, Martín Weber, asked people throughout Latin America to write their dreams on a wooden board chalkboard. Decades later, he wondered if any of those wishes had been fulfilled. This documentary follows Martin on his search for the same people, so he can see if their dreams came true.

About Latin America

Latin America is generally defined as the continent of South American in addition to Mexico, Central America, and parts of the Caribbean. In total, it includes 19 sovereign nations and Puerto Rico, which is a territory of the United States. The World Bank estimates that the total population of Latin America and the Caribbean is 658,089,208.¹ Most countries in Latin America are considered to be developing nations.

Many Latin American countries have in common the conquest and colonization of their countries by Spain and Portugal from the late 15th century through the early 18th century. That conquest started in the Caribbean, then expanded into Central America, Mexico, and South America. Not only did Europeans colonize most of Latin America, but their presence led to the decimation of native populations due to war and disease.

In the early 19th century, many Latin American nations moved to gain independence from Spain and Portugal. By 1822, the majority had become independent. Cuba and Puerto Rico gained independence from Spanish rule in 1898. However, most Latin American countries have experienced ongoing political instability since their independence.

As a result of colonization by Spain and Portugal, the African slave trade, and later immigration to the region, Latin America has a diverse mix of races and cultures. This includes indigenous people, Europeans, people of African descent, and mestizos who are of mixed ethnicity. The Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America reports that about 40 million people in Latin America are indigenous and about 130 million are Afro-descendants.² Most people in Latin America speak Spanish, except in Brazil where the main language is Portuguese. There are also hundreds of indigenous languages.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of countries in Latin America were taken over by military dictatorships, including Brazil, Argentina, and Peru. One thing that most of these dictatorships had in common was suppression of freedom of speech and the arrest of people who spoke out in opposition. Latin America's dictatorships occurred at the same time as the Cold War, when anti-communist sentiment was high in the United States. As a result of its fears of communism, the United States government encouraged and even supported some of these dictatorships because they were believed to be a way to prevent communism from spreading.

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ZJ>

² <https://perla.princeton.edu/>

Argentina

Argentina is the second largest country in South America, and the eighth largest in the world. Its population is 45.8 million. Unlike most other countries in Latin America, Argentina has a population of primarily European descent. The country received many European immigrants during the nineteenth century. Spanish is the official language, however English, German, French, Italian, and indigenous languages are also spoken there.

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military dictatorship. Under that dictatorship, between 10,000 and 30,000 people who were deemed subversive were kidnapped, tortured, and killed. These people are often referred to as the disappeared. The government also kidnapped an estimated 500 babies, falsifying their birth certificates and giving them to families that were considered to be acceptable. Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo are civil rights groups that were formed in 1977 to protest these actions. These groups, in addition to many other people in Argentina, continue to search for the babies who were kidnapped, to fight for justice for those responsible, and to ensure that Argentina's people never forget what happened.

Peru

Peru's population is about 33.3 million. Almost half of the country is covered in rain forest. The Andes—the second-highest mountain range in the world—also run through Peru. The country is known for its ancient history, such as the Incan civilization which lived there about 600 years ago and built the famous city of Machu Picchu.

It is estimated that Peru's population includes about 4 million indigenous people, with about 55 different indigenous groups speaking 47 languages. According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 83 percent are Quechua, 11 percent Aymara, 1.6 percent Ashaninka, and 4.3 percent belong to other Amazonian indigenous peoples. The organization reports that many of Peru's indigenous people are threatened by extractive activities like mining, and by climate change-related events such as droughts and forest fires.³

Nicaragua

Nicaragua has a population of 6.7 million people. It is the largest country in Central America. It is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with an estimated 30 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Nicaragua is prone to both droughts and flooding, and also suffers regular damage from tropical storms. For example, in 2020 it was hit by Hurricanes Eta and Iota, which caused widespread devastation.

3

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/peru.html#:~:text=There%20are%204%20million%20indigenous,the%20Rights%20of%20Indigenous%20Peoples.>

The Sandinista National Liberation Front is a group that overthrew the country's dictatorship in 1979, and governed Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990. In 2006, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega was elected president, and he remains in power. His wife, Rosario Murillo is vice president. According to humanitarian group USAID, there are numerous human rights concerns in Nicaragua including limits to freedom of expression and the press, arbitrary detentions, and the closing of civil society spaces.⁴

Cuba

Cuba is the largest country in the Caribbean. Its population is 11.3 million. As a result of the Caribbean's warm water, Cuba is often struck by hurricanes. The United States and Cuba have a tense relationship, and the United States has imposed economic sanctions against Cuba, and also prohibits tourist travel there.

In 1959, Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista was overthrown by Fidel Castro. Committees for the Defense of the Revolution is a network of neighborhood committees formed in 1960 for the purpose of helping to support the local community and also for reporting on counterrevolutionary activity. Cuba is currently under the leadership of President Miguel Díaz-Canel. It has a socialist government, which suppresses dissent and restricts the civil liberties of Cuba's population. Cuba relies heavily on imported goods. According to the World Food Programme, the country imports 70 to 80 percent of its food, however, as a result of economic problems and government policies, shortages of food and other goods are common.

Brazil

Brazil is the biggest country in Latin America in both area and population. It has a population of about 214 million people. It is the fifth most-populous country in the world, and has about a third of Latin America's total population. The majority of Brazilians speak Portuguese. The country has many favelas, or urban slums, particularly on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. It is estimated that almost a quarter of Rio's population lives in favelas.⁵ Brazil contains the Amazon River basin, which is one of the biggest river systems in the world and contains the world's largest rainforest.

From 1964 to 1985, Brazil was ruled by military dictatorship. During that time, civil liberties and freedom of speech were severely restricted. Many of those people who opposed the new regime were imprisoned and tortured. In total, it is estimated that thousands of people were jailed and tortured in Brazil during the years of the dictatorship, and around 400 were killed. Many Brazilians continue to protest the fact that very few of the crimes committed under the dictatorship were ever punished.

⁴ <https://www.usaid.gov/nicaragua>

⁵ <https://catcomm.org/favela-facts/>

Colombia

Colombia has about 51 million people. It is the second-biggest country in South America, and the third biggest in Latin America. It was named after explorer Christopher Columbus. Colombia is considered to be one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, and its Serrania del Chiribiquete rainforest is the largest protected tropical rainforest in existence. Colombia is one of the biggest coca bush-producing countries in the world, and home to many drug trafficking organizations.

The nation of Colombia has experienced years of conflict as a result of confrontations between guerrilla, government, and paramilitary forces, and also due to criminal activity related to the illegal drug market. Guerilla movements say that they are fighting to protect the poor. As a result of the violence related to this conflict, millions of people have been forced to leave their homes and possessions. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that 2.3 million Colombians were internally displaced between 2008 and 2021.

Guatemala

Guatemala has a population of about 17 million. It is the most populous country in Central American, and one of the most densely populated countries in Latin America. Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, and is spoken by most of the population, however many Guatemalans also speak indigenous languages. The country has 25 indigenous languages, most of them Mayan languages.

Every year, thousands of Guatemalans migrate to other countries, with many of them going to the United States. Statistics from U.S. Customs and Border Protection show that a large percentage of the migrants apprehended at the U.S-Mexico border come from Guatemala.⁶ Much of that migration is unauthorized. One of the main reason many Guatemalans leave their country is poverty. Almost half of Guatemalans live in poverty, and according to the United Nations, 79 percent of the country's indigenous people do.⁷ According to the World Bank, Guatemala has the highest rate of chronic malnutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸

Mexico

Mexico is the only North American country that is a part of Latin American. It is the third largest country in Latin America, and has a population of 130 million people. Most of these people are mestizo, which means a mixture of European and American indigenous ethnicity. According to the World Bank, Mexico's economy is the second largest in Latin America and among the 15 largest in the world. However, statistics show that more than 40 percent of the Mexican population lives in poverty.

⁶ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions>

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070862>

⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>

Every year, tens of thousands of migrants try to enter the United States across its border with Mexico. These majority of them come from Mexico, but they are also from many other Latin American countries.⁹ The United States does accept a limited number of immigrants, but many of the people who cross the border, or try to cross, do so illegally. “Coyotes” or “polleros,” are smugglers who help migrants cross the border illegally. Some coyotes take advantage of migrants, for instance by abandoning them or stealing their money. Tijuana is one of the border cities that migrants pass through on their way to the United States. Some migrants end up staying there rather than living in the United States or returning to the countries that they came from.



⁹ https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/how-us-patrols-its-borders?gclid=CjwKCAiAp7GcBhA0EiwA9U0mtn10g80MAK3iidvVNRlqQFQP255UCIJ7F8bgrJMcqWuLhCvqegiTIhoCokMQAvD_BwE#chapter-title-0-2

Additional Resources

Books

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- Virginia Garrard, Peter V.N. Henderson, and Bryan McCann (2023). *Latin America in the Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
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- Robert Taliercio O'Brien and Hugo Ñopo (October 17, 2022). Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Long and Bumpy Road Ahead, *World Bank Blogs*.
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/poverty-latin-america-and-caribbean-long-and-bumpy-road-ahead>

Contact

For inquiries, please contact:

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info@epfmedia.com

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