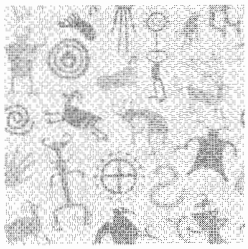

# Central and South America: Introduction

Depending on the definition used, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, about 40 million people in Central and South America—about 10 percent of the population—were considered indigenous, with the majority concentrated in southern Mexico, Central America, and the Andes Mountains. Native communities remained very much alive and vibrant across the continents. But, defining who is "native" is a complicated question in Latin America, particularly in light of the degree of cultural and biological mixing of peoples that has occurred over the past half millennium. Anthropologists commonly employed external characteristics, such as language, clothing, residency, occupation, and religious practices, to determine ethnic affiliation. Individuals could slide back and forth between categories based on varying criteria, definitions, or the political expediencies of the moment. Furthermore, indigenous groups have ranged from small, isolated communities to large, vibrant groups with a significant social, economic, and polirical presence in the life of a country.

Scholars, activists, and indigenous community members have long debated what terminology is most appropriate to refer to the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. The most common term, *Indian,* also has been the most controversial. The term is attributable to Christopher Columbus's mistaken sense of geography—thinking that he had arrived in India, he called the native peoples Indians. However, many indigenous people found the term objectionable because of its colonial origins and external imposition, as well as its pejorative association with dirty, ignorant, or inferior populations. At the same time, some militant indigenous activists took up the word as a term of pride, arguing that they had been colonized by that name and would liberate themselves with it as well. Often, the term *indigenous* was used as a more proper and respectful substitute for *Indian*; some advocated using new terms such as *original* or *ancestral* peoples.

All of this terminology has had the additional liability of implying the homogenization of hundreds of distinct groups of people across the continent. Seeking an umbrella term for widely divergent populations was an inherently political and colonizing exercise. Identity remained overwhelmingly local, and many indigenous peoples identified with their own group rather than with some pan-ethnic construction. Instead, some argued, it would be more appropriate to refer to each group by its own name for itself. While outsiders imposed names on individual groups, most commonly, groups referred to themselves as "the people" (or some variation of that word) in their own language.

An equally thorny semantic minefield was whether to speak of indigenous peoples or ethnic groups. While the term *tribe* had legal standing in North America, most indigenous people rejected it because of its derogatory connotations and its anthropological inaccuracy in describing stages of sociocultural evolution. Some militants argued that, instead, it was more proper to speak of indigenous nationalities, as each group had its own unique history, language, religion, and cultural traits.

While colonial officials spoke of "Indian nations" and, on occasion, administered populations as such, the term gained renewed interest in the 1920s, when the group Communist International advocated for the creation of an independent indigenous republic in the Andes region. In the 1980s, indigenous activists began to embrace this term as their own. No matter what terminology is applied or how one defines them, thousands of different ethnolinguistic groups inhabited the Americas before the arrival of Europeans in 1492.

## Early Civilizations

Humans had inhabited the Americas for thousands of years before the Europeans arrived. Even the Aztec (Mexica) and Inca (Tawantinsuyu) empires are quite recent civilizations. A standard interpretation of the population of the Americas is that people migrated across the Bering Strait from Central Asia as far back as 40,000 to 100,000 years ago in search of game, although archaeological evidence now indicates the possibility of multiple migratory streams and crossing points. Many groups have creation stories that poinr to their origins in their home communities.

Upon coming to the Americas, the migrants fragmented into more than 2,000 different sociolinguistic

groups that had little shared identity. The disappearance of large game and the growth of agriculture led to the beginnings of sedentary village life. By about 2,000 years ago, improvements in agriculture, culture, and social structures led to the emergence of what could be called civilization. Archaeologists refer to areas of advanced cultural development in Mesoamerica and the Andes as "Nuclear America." The discovery of Stone Age etchings in 2010 indicates that the Amazon River Basin was home to higher levels of civilization than previously believed, with population densities perhaps surpassing current levels. Cities grew to sizes comparable to those in Europe, with population estimates at the time of the Spanish conquest ranging as high as 100 million people.

Archaeologists have established a sequence of civilizations that generally alternated between centralized and localized control. In Mesoamerica, the Olmec civilization (ca. 1500–400 B.C.E.) introduced hieroglyphic writing and calendrics that the subsequent Maya and Aztec civilizations would develop to a higher level and use to expand their control over broad areas. In the Andes, the Chavín culture (ca. 800 B.C.E.–200 C.E.) introduced ceramic and weaving traditions that the Moche, Tiwanaku, and Inca civilizations subsequently exploited to extend their reach.

Both the Aztec and Inca were sophisticated, efficient, and highly stratified empires. The Aztec governed through a militaristic tribute empire, while the Inca rulers of Tawantinsuyu engaged in direct political and military dominance of neighboring groups. By some indications, the Inca destroyed more of the ethnic diversity in the Andes with their mission to bring their superior religion and culture to those they saw as savages surrounding them than the Spanish did later.

## Conquest and Colonization

Christopher Columbus sailed out of a Europe that was in decline in 1492, building his enterprise on the aspirations of lesser nobles who were desperate to regain their social and economic status. The potential for large profit margins and the lack of opportunity in Europe made the extremely high risk of voyaging to the New World worth it for many conquistadores. An initial period of exploration in the Caribbean resulted in the decimation of the aboriginal population through onerous work demands and the spread of European diseases, against which the natives had little resistance. The result was a demographic catastrophe and the extermination of many native groups. Today, few self-identified indigenous peoples remain in the Caribbean.

A second wave of conquest led to the collapse of the Aztec at the hands of Hernán Cortés in 1521 and Francisco Pizarro's capture of the Inca leader Atahualpa in 1532. The Spanish defeat of these advanced civilizations can be attributed to many factors—but European superiority had little to do with it. After all, both the Aztec and Inca empires had battled-hardened professional militaries that successfully had subjugated neighboring groups. Disease clearly played a role, as did a certain amount of luck. More directly, different cosmologies and styles of warfare played a role: the Spanish employed a style of total warfare against the civilian population, whereas the native peoples of the Americas placed value on honor over victory. In addition, both the Aztec and Inca had alienated many of their neighbors, who jumped at the chance to join the invaders and rid themselves of their current masters, not realizing that the Spanish would become worse and more abusive overlords.

While Europeans came in search of spices and precious metals, always under the ideological justification of the religious conversion of their new subjects, they soon realized that the true wealth of the Americas lay in the region's potential labor force. To exploit this pool of labor, the conquistadores forced the native peoples into systems of slave labor. When the Spanish Crown outlawed this practice in 1542, the colonizers simply continued it under new mechanisms. In New Spain (now Mexico), the Spanish used the Aztec tribute rolls to extract labor and resources. In the Andes, they manipulated a traditional process of reciprocal exchange called the *mit'a* into a new system that exploited labor without concern for its negative ramifications on home communities. Through this process, the Spanish extracted vast amounts of wealth from the Postosí silver mines in Bolivia, impoverishing the region.

From the beginning of Spanish colonization, the aboriginal inhabitants of Central and South America engaged in fierce resistance to protect their homelands and to guard against enslavement in forced labor systems. Some of the stories of resistance were legendary, fueling the aspirations of their descendants. In 1511, Taino hero Hatuey rallied the members of his community against the Spanish, famously preferring to go to hell rather than convert to Christianity and join his torturers in heaven. In another story, Indian workers who tired of the Europeans' insatiable thirst for gold decided to melt the mineral into a molten liquid and force-feed it to their masters. The resistance often took highly individualistic characteristics, including breaking tools, working slowly, fleeing to inhospitable areas, and even such extremes as suicide and infanticide so that new generations would not have to be born into systems of oppression and exploitation.

In addition to localized and often disorganized forms of resistance, large-scale revolts occasionally broke out. Spanish attempts to subjugate the Maya Peninsula faced

repeated failure, with revolts breaking out in 1542 and again in 1697 and 1712. In each case, the colonizers were able to control only the areas that they occupied militarily; once they left, these regions reverted to native control. In southern Chile, the Mapuche people largely held the Spanish at bay until the nineteenth century.

After Pizarro captured Atahualpa in 1532, Inca General Rumiñahui continued the battle until he was captured and killed three years later. Nevertheless, another group of Inca rulers retreated to Vilcabamba and continued to rule the empire in exile until the Spanish captured and executed the last leader, Túpac Amaru, in 1572.

More than a hundred revolts ripped through the Andes during the eighteenth century, with the uprisings becoming increasingly large scale, widespread, and violent. The largest revolt took place at the end of the colonial period, when José Gabriel Condorcanqui took the name of his ancestor Túpac Amaru and launched a pan-Andean uprising in favor of indigenous workers before he was brutally executed in Cuzco, the old Inca capital, in 1781. His actions inspired others to take similar action, most notably Julián Apasa, who took the name Túpac Katari and encircled La Paz before he also was captured and killed. This history of revolts demonstrates that Indians did not accept their fate passively, but rather continued to actively assert their rights.

## Independence

Indigenous communities provided much of the cannon fodder in the Latin American wars for independence (1809–1825), but in the end, they had little to show for their efforts. The Spanish Crown at least had engaged in the rhetoric of maintaining a separate republic for the Indians so as to protect them from the worst aspects of colonial abuses. With the removal of that paternalistic power, the European settlers were free to prey openly on their workers. As a result, the position of indigenous people in society declined even more drastically, with the benefits of the independence struggles accruing to the dominant classes.

In 1858, Benito Juárez assumed the presidency of Mexico. A Zapotec lawyer and former governor of Oaxaca, he was the first indigenous president in the Americas and arguably the only one in the history of Mexico. He ruled as a liberal reformer who embraced modernizing concepts of capitalism in order to destroy feudalistic systems. Some indigenous communities supported Juárez, believing that a federalist system would give them greater control over local resources. Privatizing communal indigenous landholdings, however, typically meant that they passed to wealthy landholders. Half a century later, indigenous peasants fought in the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) to regain their land base.

This history repeated itself throughout the Americas during the nineteenth century. For example, in 1899, indigenous warriors allied with liberals against conservatives in a civil war in Bolivia. When it became clear that the liberals would not implement policies to benefit the lower classes, indigenous communities turned against their former allies.

In the nineteenth century, indigenous peoples increasingly became marginalized in rural areas. White elites controlled most of the profitable arable land, with Indians crowded onto small and degraded plots. Indians suffered from malnutrition and a lack of health care, resulting in high infant mortality rates and short life expectancies. Most Indians did not have access to education, and governments used their illiteracy as a mechanism to deny them the vote. Although they were the original inhabitants of the continent, indigenous peoples were not allowed to vote until 1952 in Bolivia, 1978 in Peru, 1979 in Ecuador, and 1991 in Colombia.

## Languages

Although Latin America commonly is associated with the colonial Spanish and Portuguese languages, it is a place of remarkable linguistic diversity. During the colonial period, Spanish priests facilitated the extinction of smaller less widespread languages by spreading the dominant Guaraní, Nahuatl, Mapudungun, and Quechua languages as lingua francas for purposes of evangelization, solidifying the use of dominant languages.

While scores of languages have disappeared, hundreds of indigenous languages have survived into the twenty-first century, and local indigenous words have remained as geographic place-names of lakes, rivers, and mountains. In the twentieth century, evangelical Christian missionary work brought awareness to small and marginalized language groups. In particular, the Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics translated the Bible into multiple languages, helping to document and preserve them.

Quechua is the largest surviving indigenous language in Central and South America. It is spoken across the Andean highlands from Colombia to Chile by 8 million to 12 million people. The next-largest language is Guaraní, with between 2 million and 3 million speakers in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay. About thirty different Maya languages are spoken throughout Chiapas, Guatemala, and the Yucatán Peninsula. Nahuatl in Mexico and Mapudungun, spoken by the Mapuche in Chile and Argentina, also remain important.

While language has been a marker of ethnic identity,

it has functioned less so in Bolivia and Paraguay. In Bolivia, Aymara and Quechua long have been used as market languages, spoken by people who otherwise would not consider themselves indigenous. Similarly, in Paraguay, which is home to a small percentage of self-identified indigenous peoples, Guaraní functioned alongside Spanish as a national language, although its use declined at the end of the twentieth century.

Whether to grant indigenous languages official status has long been a controversial topic. In 1975, the Peruvian government's recognition of Quechua as a national language on par with Spanish represented a significant breakthrough. Despite employing a team of linguists to publish grammars and dictionaries of six different Quechua variations, this policy remained largely symbolic without accompanying systemic changes.

## Education

Indigenous communities found educational programs to be either part of the oppressive colonial structures or a pathway to liberation. During the colonial period, education largely was reserved for the children of the indigenous elite. Occasionally, its intent was subverted by indigenous people, as in the case of Túpac Amaru II, who received a Jesuit education but used the skills that he acquired to challenge the colonial system.

In the nineteenth century, liberal reformers began to design rural elementary school systems to assimilate indigenous children into the dominant culture. Because communities were not consulted in the design of these programs, students felt alienated and paid little attention to the lessons. Local wealthy landowners also opposed

## INDIGENISMO

From the 1920s through the early 1950s, a massive political and social mobilization of lower-class groups, intellectuals, government officials, and indigenous peoples throughout Latin America, known as *indigenismo,* shaped the debate over how to politically, socially, and economically integrate indigenous peoples into national, mainstream societies, while, at the same time, advocating the inherent value of indigenous cultures. Indigenismo was most influential in areas that had significant indigenous populations, particularly in the Andes region of South America, Mexico, and Guatemala.

During the 1920s, the social and cultural movement in Peru was grounded in debates between provincial elites and intellectuals who used art, music, and literature to highlight indigenous culture and to give these forms a significant place in Peruvian society. The ultimate goal was to transform indigenous peoples into Peruvian citizens.

In Bolivia, the movement hinged on the creation of special privileges for indigenous peoples. Between 1920 and 1924, the creation of specific laws and government agencies to deal with indigenous issues was discussed but never implemented.

In Mexico, the emergence of indigenismo followed the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920. The height of political and economic integration came during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), when regional indigenous congresses were organized to give political voice to the country's native peoples. Cárdenas also established the Department of Indigenous Affairs (1936–1946) to cater to indigenous interests. The National Indigenous Institute spearheaded the mission of indigenismo after 1948.

In Guatemala, indigenismo emerged during a decade of significant change, 1944 to 1954, when indigenous communities were granted some social, economic, and political rights. The Guatemalan constitution of 1945 included a provision that made the national government responsible for the social, political, and economic inclusion of indigenous Guatemalans, mostly ethnic Maya. Additionally, the constitution established a National Indigenous Institute, which was charged with training Guatemalan anthropologists to work among the nation's indigenous populations in order to preserve their languages and cultures.

After 1950, indigenous groups began to challenge the ideology of indigenismo. In Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru today, indigenous peoples continue to contest the ways in which they are included in or excluded from national society. Examples of this resistance include the Pan-Maya movement, a Guatemalan movement that arose in the mid-1980s to unify indigenous Maya groups in the interest of linguistic and cultural preservation, and the 1994 uprising in the Mexican state of Chiapas.

In Bolivia, the indigenous challenge to dominant national views resulted in the election of Evo Morales, ethnically Aymara, to the presidency in 2005. In her 2008 book *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism,* Estelle Tarica characterized modern indigenismo as being in a transitional state, with the cultural elites who headed the effort in previous years passing on the torch of leadership to the growing middle classes of indigenous people.

*María L.O. Muñoz*

bilingual schools, fearing that they would undermine their control over the labor force. Some felt that it was a waste of resources to educate those who were destined for a life of hard labor and would only make it more likely that they would revolt. In any case, the schools chronically were underfunded, assuring their failure. More successful were indigenous-initiated projects, or situations in which indigenous organizations gained control of national bilingual education programs, as occurred in Ecuador in the 1980s.

Increased educational opportunities paralleled a heavy migration away from indigenous rural areas and toward urban areas that were traditionally European spaces. In the early twenty-first century, indigenous organizations began to initiate higher education projects, but they faced the same problems and controversies as earlier programs. Besides being chronically underfunded, they also had to overcome resistance from the dominant culture, which opposed challenges to their hegemonic control of society. Furthermore, a persistent question remained as to whether it was more advantageous to retreat into an indigenous educational system that would reinforce one's own cultural assumptions or to participate in a more rigorous public system but face the risk of assimilation. Many of the strongest indigenous leaders were politicized through the public educational system.

## Revolts

With the native peoples' economic prospects hardly improving and, in fact, declining, indigenous revolts continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These often were reactions to haciendas expanding onto indigenous communal lands, the imposition of government taxes and labor drafts, and the actions of abusive officials. These movements took place against the backdrop of significant economic and social changes that rarely benefited indigenous communities. Different ideologies fueled these movements, with some desperately attempting to hold on to a rapidly disappearing past, while others fought for a new and better future.

In one of the most significant nineteenth-century uprisings, the Maya almost expelled the Spanish from the Yucatán Peninsula in what came to be known as the Caste War of Yucatán, beginning in 1847. However, the Maya peasants, on the verge of expelling the colonists and recapturing control of the peninsula, returned to their home communities to plant their crops. Similar revolts took place in Chiapas in 1869 and among the Yaqui in Sonora in 1896. Observers debate whether these uprisings were racially charged, or whether elite charges of indigenous engagement in race wars were a mechanism to denigrate legitimate and serious charges of abuse.

In the South American Andes, resistance strategies included litigation and occupation of hacienda lands. In 1886, Pedro Pablo Atusparia led a revolt against a poll tax on the indigenous peasantry in Peru. In 1899, Aymara leader Pablo Zárate Willka raised an indigenous army that demanded the restoration of traditional lands and the establishment of an indigenous government. In 1915, Teodomiro Gutiérrez took the name Rumi Maqui (Quechua for "Stone Hand") and led a radical separatist revolt that employed the rhetoric of restoring the Inca empire of Tawantinsuyu.

Expropriation of community lands led to a massive tevolt at Jesús de Machaca in the Lake Titicaca district of Bolivia in 1921. Several years later, in one of the largest indigenous uprisings of the twentieth century, 10,000 people attacked haciendas in Chayanta Province in northern Potosí. Ultimately, the government's superior firepower and the lack of indigenous unity led to the failure of these revolts and the massacres of hundreds of people. These uprisings, however, stopped hacienda expansion onto community lands and achieved the replacement of local officials.

In the 1920s, indigenous peasants began to organize rural syndicates. Often allied with urban labor unions or leftist political parties, the syndicates represented a shift away from a focus on local and narrowly conceptualized issues to agitation for larger and more structural changes. In Colombia, Nasa leader Manuel Quintín Lame led powerful campaigns to reclaim indigenous lands during the 1910s–1920s. In Bolivia, Aymara and Quechua Indians agitated for land reform following the 1952 nationalist revolution. This grew into a Katarista movement that took its name from the late colonial indigenous leader Túpac Katari. Bridging a long-perceived division between ethnic identities and class consciousness, the Indians announced that they would analyze their exploitation with "two eyes," as indigenous peoples and as peasants.

In Guatemala, a Maya nationalist movement emerged that championed cultural pride in traditional lifestyles, dress, religion, language, literature, and education. In 1992, activist Rigoberta Menchu, who had become renowned for her testimonial *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (1983), won the Nobel Peace Prize and became a high-profile international symbol of the indigenous rights movement.

Indigenous militancy emerged not only in Bolivia and Guatemala among majority and largely homogenous indigenous populations, but also in countries such as Colombia, which had a small and extremely diverse Indian population. Although they represented only 3 percent of the population, Indians became a significant political force through the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC, National Indigenous Organization of Colombia). Thanks to these efforts, indigenous peoples

gained far-reaching concessions, including citizenship and territorial rights, as well as official recognition of ethnic diversity and indigenous languages in the 1991 Colombian constitution. Similarly, in Venezuela, many indigenous rights were codified in the 1999 constitution, including recognition of their languages, organizations, and lands.

More than any other action, the 1994 Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army) uprising in Chiapas in southern Mexico thrust indigenous demands into mainstream consciousness. Although the rebellion was led by twelve Maya commanders, the charismatic mestizo warrior-poet known as Subcomandante Marcos emerged as the public face of the indigenous struggle for land, education, freedom, democracy, and justice.

## Commodity Wars

Indigenous communities have long faced conflicts over the economic development of their lands. In 1993, the Cofán, Secoya, and Siona peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon sued Texaco in New York for polluting their lands during the process of petroleum extraction. Bolivia has been home to the cultivation of coca leaves, used for medical and ritual purposes, for some time. Because coca also is one of the raw ingredients in the production of cocaine, this cultivation was targeted in the war on drugs even as indigenous farmers defended their right to grow coca.

In Brazil, the Kayapó used modern technology such as video cameras to document their struggle against the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam on the Xingu River. They gained an international profile in the first decades of the twenty-first century when British rock star Sting rallied to their cause.

## Transnational Organizing Strategies

In the 1960s and 1970s, activists increasingly organized indigenous movements along ethnic lines, with the support of nongovernmental organizations and within a transnational framework. The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs grew out of a 1968 meeting of anthropologists who had witnessed the abuses that indigenous peoples faced. In 1975, the work group helped establish the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, and in 1980, its South American branch, the Consejo Indio de Sud América (CISA, South American Indian Council), the first regional indigenous organization in South America, attacked colonial centers of power as it sought to recoup ethnic identities and unify indigenous organizations in a liberation struggle.

In 1983, Nilo Cayuqueo, a Mapuche from southern Argentina, launched the South American Indian Information Center (SAIIC) in California to provide information on and international support for CISA and the indigenous rights movement in South America. In 1984, Amazonian indigenous organizations formed the Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica (Coordinating Body for the Indigenous People's Organization of the Amazon) to act internationally to defend their territorial, cultural, economic, and political rights. It became best known for its alliances with environmental groups.

With an ethnic consciousness heightened by protests against the quincentennial celebrations of Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage to the Americas, many of these movements embraced common demands for recognition of the pluricultural nature of Latin American societies. This helped drive a powerful indigenous uprising in Ecuador in June 1990 that paralyzed the country for a week. The Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) was at the forefront of these protests, and its mobilizations earned Ecuador a reputation as having the most powerful and well-organized indigenous movement in the Americas. A month after the uprising, CONAIE joined with the SAIIC and ONIC to organize the First Continental Conference on 500 Years of Indian Resistance in Quito, Ecuador. Representatives from throughout the Americas gathered to form a united front to struggle against oppression, discrimination, and exploitation.

Indigenous activists also have played a leading role in challenges to capitalist and neoliberal economic systems. While these responses occasionally were reactionary in character, advocating a return to pre–monetary exchange systems, more often they allied with leftist forces, articulating a vision of creating a new and better world that would provide space for everyone. In the 1990s, indigenous organizations participated in protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas and, later, in the World Social Forum. Indigenous activists also organized a series of continental summits centered on issues of common concern, providing a venue for some of the most outspoken voices in the debate on climate change.

## From Resistance to Power

As indigenous organizing efforts gained traction, activists debated how and whether to engage the electoral system. An issue that has divided indigenous organizing efforts was whether to organize by themselves or in alliance with other sympathetic, often leftist, forces. Some advocated that in countries with a majority indigenous population, such as Bolivia and Guatemala, they should organize on the basis of ethnicity, whereas in other countries where indigenous peoples were a minority,

they would have to campaign in alliance with others. The difficulties that indigenous candidates faced even in Bolivia and Guatemala, however, indicated that the issue was much larger than simple demographics. Instead, political power was skewed significantly toward the interests of the wealthy oligarchy, and overcoming structural barriers would be exceedingly difficult.

In the face of these realities, some activists embraced a "fourth world" ideology that advocated separation from existing nation-states. Self-government appeared to be an emancipating force in the face of the failure of liberal promises of full and equal citizenship, which only had resulted in destructive forms of integration. Critics, however, complained that such moves would only embolden conservative interests, or that they would result in impoverished microstates without a sufficient industrial base to build a viable independent country.

In 1987, Miskito Indians on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast signed an autonomy agreement with the leftist Sandinista government. In the early twenty-first century, however, when members of the conservative oligarchy sought to break resource-rich provinces away from leftist governments in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, many indigenous activists came to understand that working for autonomy was not in their best interest. Rather, it would be more advantageous to work together with others in their respective nations, seeking common solutions.

In 1993, Aymara activist Víctor Hugo Cárdenas won election as vice president in Bolivia, the highest office that an indigenous candidate had won in a majority indigenous country. In order to win election, however, Cárdenas had campaigned with Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who advocated implementing neoliberal economic policies that were damaging to rural communities and other poor people. Cárdenas advocated that indigenous activists in other countries make similar alliances with conservative politicians so as to gain a seat at the table. Critics complained that a victory for one individual did not represent an advance for the broader indigenous world, particularly if that individual did not use his or her position to advance indigenous interests.

In 1995, activists in Ecuador founded a political party called Pachakutik to run candidates for office. They realized some electoral success but still had more impact as a social movement, using street protests to force presidents from office. Ten years later in Bolivia, indigenous leader Evo Morales built on the strength of indigenous social movements to win the presidency, becoming the first indigenous person to be chief executive in that country and arguably only the second indigenous president in the Americas after Benito Juárez. Engaging in the electoral process was a tacit recognition that embracing ethnic politics alone was not a solution to the persistent problems of poverty and marginalization. Addressing such issues would require challenging the very structures of oppression built into many modern governments from their founding. At the same time, political openings assured more rights for indigenous peoples and guaranteed that they would survive and even flourish in the future.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, indigenous peoples remained a well-organized force in Latin America. Far from being static, they continually embraced new strategies and technologies such as the Internet to voice their concerns and advance their causes.

*Marc Becker*

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