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**The Mystery of Brazil**  
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On the American continents there are three very large countries. One of them, Canada is mostly too far north to support a dense population and hence is largely unpopulated. The other two, however are very similar. They are roughly the same size and both have, along the Atlantic Coast, a large area which is a mix of level ground and low hills and mountains with their basic drainage into the Atlantic. This was largely forested when Europeans first arrived. In both of these cases when you get through this rather large coastal area you come to the drainage of a major river, the Amazon in one case and the Mississippi in the other.

Both before the Europeans arrived were inhabited by scattered Indian tribes. Mostly these Indian tribes were in the hunting and gathering stage, but agriculture was practiced by some of them. As is the custom with primitive people, the tribes were mainly at war with each other. The high civilizations of some Indians in Mexico and farther south did not reach the area eventually occupied by either Brazil or the United States. The Maya, probably the highest of the Indian civilizations, had died out several hundred years before Columbus. The very unpleasant Aztecs had their center in Mexico and the successfully imperialistic Incas were west of the area which eventually became Brazil.

In spite of this geographic similarity, there are very great differences between the two countries. One of them is widely recognized as the world's leading power and has an extremely high living standard for its citizens. The other, Brazil, might claim to be the leading power in South America, although Argentina would contest even that claim, and it has a living standard which is in no way outstanding. The mystery in the title of this paper is why the difference is so great although the natural advantages of the two places seem very similar.

Let me begin by looking at the population distribution in the two countries. The transparency I have put on the screen is not very clear but a major difference between the two is obvious. In both cases there is a reasonably dense population along the Atlantic Coast. In United States, however, the drainage of the monster Mississippi River is heavily populated. In Brazil the drainage of the Amazon is almost empty. The mountains on the Pacific Coast of United States are also well populated, but the population had to go through the Mississippi basin to get there. The Pacific coastal mountains west of Brazil are, of course, parts of other countries parts of other countries. Why the difference?

In talking with colleagues on the subject, I find that they began by saying, that the climate of the Amazon basin makes agriculture impossible, or at least very difficult. This indicates, of course, that the people I have asked are citizens either of the United States or of the northern part of the Eurasian continent. It is true that corn and wheat would not flourish in the Amazon basin. But the Indians, (living in India) the Chinese (at least

those in the southern part of China), the Japanese and the inhabitants of various islands like Java, the rest of Indonesia and the Philippines make a living very successfully with agriculture in areas which were originally tropical rain forests.

Another possibility is disease. The Amazon basin is certainly not a highly healthy environment for human beings. On the other hand the citizens of India live in a somewhat similar climate. The Portuguese who were the original discoverers and settlers of Brazil got there through navigational error on their way to the tropics of southern Asia, equally unhealthy. They also made a number of settlements in Africa, which would seem to indicate that tropical climates were not uninhabitable to the citizens of, at least, southern Europe.

It should be pointed out that the southern part United States is also in the malaria zone, and the fact that Europeans knew this led to fewer white people going to Georgia voluntarily than to Massachusetts. Still Georgia was populated and the South was, before the Civil War, thought to be highly prosperous. There was a period of poverty and backwardness after the War, but the south has now fully recovered.<sup>1</sup>

United States began with north European immigrants and has only recently received large numbers from the South. Since the cultures of these two European areas are somewhat

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<sup>1</sup>It might be noted that the South was important for the Industrial Revolution. The first Industrial Revolution was largely based on cotton textiles. The cotton was raised by slaves in the southern part of United States.

different and northern Europe is more prosperous than southern, a cultural solution cannot be ruled out. Granted however that Argentina is, or to be more exact was, very prosperous and is largely inhabited by people from southern Europe this solution does not seem decisive. You can, of course, argue that the Italians who make up so much of the Argentine population are, somehow, more adapted to producing a modern country than the Iberians from the same latitude and climate. .

Racial explanations, of almost anything, are highly, unpopular at the moment. Indeed research on such matters is more or less taboo. Since in my opinion the racial difference between societies is not much of an explanatory variable, except possibly for the superior performance of Orientals in American higher education, I don't think this possible explanation should be given much weight. Still it must be admitted that there is at least some racial difference because the Brazilians were much more likely to interbreed with the Indians already there and the black slaves that they brought in. Hence if we were make a count of genes as we would find that the average Brazilian has fewer white ancestors than the average citizen of the United States. I don't, and I don't think many of my readers, will, regard this as a matter of importance.

It should be it should perhaps be emphasized that Brazil got a big head start. There were major cities with universities in Brazil before the first English settlers set foot in Virginia. Indeed the oldest city in United States is Spanish St. Augustine which also existed before the first English settlers.

Having ruled out geography and race, how about culture? In the annals of 1776, a Scotch instrument repairman filed a patent for a steam engine. Another Scot, a professor, published a book which would come close to controlling the development of economic policy as a theory and as a practice for the next hundred or maybe 200 years.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, a document was signed far across the Atlantic in Philadelphia.

So far this paper has dealt with the difference between Brazil and United States, most specifically the difference between the Mississippi watershed and the Amazon watershed. If the difference is cultural, however, then we might expect different rates of development between other areas which have much the same pair of cultures. Compare for example the different rates of development of England and the part of the Iberians culture which is in Europe.

The first thing to note is that the Industrial Revolution occurred in England and England developed with great rapidity throughout most of the 19th-century. By 1890 England had the highest per capita income of any country in the world. Further, they built up during this period the world's largest empire. Part of that empire was already densely settled, as in India, and the empire took a form of controlling the inhabitants with only a relatively few number of English brought in to control it. Part of the empire, like the United States and Brazil, had little in the way of a native population. This part of the empire was

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<sup>2</sup>Hopefully 300.

settled by Europeans from north Europe. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa all developed very rapidly. This was certainly not true with respect to most of the Iberian world. The empire of Spain disappeared and Brazil broke off from Portugal but retained a member the Portuguese royal family as Emperor. Further Portugal acquired quite a considerable empire in Africa without much fighting. All these areas were listed as rather backward, again, except for the southern cone of South America.

This does not tell us what it is about the culture which we are hypothesizing led to rapid growth and exploitation of natural resources, but they surely suggest that there is something there. Before engaging in any careful effort to find the distinction, I may give the reader a little bit of Brazilian history with which most English-speaking scholars are unfamiliar.

When Napoleon moved into the Iberian peninsula he attacked Portugal and the Portuguese abandoned most of their area in Iberia to him. The King of Portugal was evacuated by the British Navy to Brazil. It should be said that he brought with him the bulk of the bureaucracy running the Portuguese kingdom. This was a sharp distinction between Brazil and United States. When we became independent we did not acquire the bureaucracy in London which had been, rather feebly, controlling our economy before. Thus Brazil began with the Iberian type government and retained it when it declared independence with the heir to the Portuguese throne proclaiming him self emperor. Thus

the cultural difference between England and its colonies and former colonies on the one hand and Portugal and its former colony on the other remained intact.

The cultural diversity between Portugal and Spain was not great and the difference between the Spanish colonies and the Portuguese colonies on the American continent was also not great. It is notable that the ex-Spanish colonies inherited from their previous imperial status a considerable amount of land in the Amazon basin. This was hard to get to from the Spanish cultural area because of the barrier of the Andes. Nevertheless I think it is not entirely coincidental that it is just as undeveloped as is the Brazilian part of the Amazon basin. Iberian culture is Iberian culture and Anglo Saxon culture is Anglo-Saxon. Possibly they lead to different results.

We must not turn to a brief summary on the military history of Europe. After the collapse of the Roman Empire Europe was divided into a number of small kingdoms which were in pretty much continuous war. At the time Columbus crossed the Atlantic and the Portuguese went around the southern tip of Africa, Spain was one of the major contenders. Indeed the most warlike of the kings and Spain was also Holy Roman Emperor and did most of his fighting in Germany. He split his empire, and his succeeding kings of Spain did not control very much in Germany. They devoted the bulk of their effort to trying to impose Catholicism on Germany.

While this was the bulk of their effort they also obtained, almost, “in a bit of absence mindedness”, much of Latin America. Cortes and Pizarro were essentially private

enterprise operators who added to the domains of Spain. The kings of Spain were not much interested in this until they found gold and silver. In fact made efforts prevent Spaniards from migrating to the new possessions.

England at that time a minor power, and the Netherlands, which succeeded in becoming independent, were not major players at this time. For reasons that are not in any sense clear, both England and the Netherlands developed as major naval powers. As a result they set up colonies along the East Coast of what is now United States as well as trading posts throughout much of the East. For reasons now unknown, Spain began to lose military power. Portugal had never had very much, and in fact was for a while a possession of the King of Spain.

We must now turn to other aspect of Anglo-Saxon culture, one which it shares with its neighbors in the area from which the Anglo-Saxons came. This is a tendency to engage in aggressive wars for the purpose of geographical conquest. This was, of course, a pretty general pattern of behavior in Europe, indeed in the world. Many modern students will regard this with grave disapproval, but it was essential for the development of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, all prosperous countries whose culture, and many of whose inhabitants, come from England.

Beginning sometime in the 18th-century, England began collecting a major overseas empire, essentially by military means. Although their army and Navy were mainly preoccupied with Europe and in particular France, they seized little land there. Their

major conquest, of course, was India. Wellington won his first important battles in India and only then returned to beat Napoleon. But few Englishmen migrated to India and many migrated across the Atlantic so that by 1776 there was a thin chain of English-speaking settlements along the coast.

The Netherlands and Belgian were of course much smaller places and Belgian is at least half French. Nevertheless the empires that they acquired were gigantic compared to their home territory. Although the Netherlands early held trading posts and some small spice islands, it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that they conquered the bulk of their holdings in Indonesia. France also acquired a big empire but lots of it was desert. It is notable that although Portugal and Spain had been major imperial powers earlier, the imperial impulse seems to have died out by the 18th-century.

In a way we can say that the instinct for conquest drifted north from the Mediterranean to Teutonic speaking countries in the north. The Iberian countries not only did not expand, they permitted their empires to drift away or to be conquered by other countries. The fact that Brazil did not aggressively push out of the coastal area, and into the Amazon basin would appear to indicate that this lack of aggressive drive was the same as in the other Iberian countries.

Empires can be divided into two general categories. Firstly there are those areas where the Metropolitan power took political control, but did not actively settle. They developed considerable economic and political power, and in some cases significant military forces,

but the personnel were primarily native. They were commanded of course by officers and political governors from the home country. There were also troops from the home country, but they were normally heavily outnumbered by native troops with European officers. Eventually these colonies became independent.

The second general category is cases in which settlers from Europe were brought in to areas which were either empty or at least thinly populated. Brazil is an example of this originally, but the expansion stopped not too far from the Atlantic Coast. Australia pushed the black fellows out with little fighting. There were not very many of them and their culture was very primitive. New Zealand was able to keep Maoris from causing much difficulty and indeed the relations between the white New Zealanders who make up the overwhelming bulk of the population and the remnants of the older Polynesian population are reasonably friendly.

United States and Canada followed another course. In both cases large numbers of immigrants came in from England or other parts of Europe and they pushed the Indians back, frequently by violent, if small, aggressive wars. The Iberian countries normally either tried to absorb the Indians or left them alone in backward parts of the country. The church was interested in converting the Indians with a result that there are number of beautiful missions scattered through southwestern United States. There was much intermarriage with the results that Mexicans or Peruvians are apt to have very many Indian ancestors.

The only really large war of aggression carried out by the United States was that with Mexico. Except for a few missions the area that we took from Mexico was not really administered by the Mexicans but by either the Indians or, in part, the Texans. In fact after the war was over, a number of Indians did not recognize the transfer of sovereignty and Geronimo was one of our most significant Indian opponents.

For some reason we stopped annexing areas in about 1900. Cuba and the Philippines were given their independence after we took them from Spain. Puerto Rico could have independence if it wanted it (or could be a state) but their present financial situation as a dominion is very favorable and they want to continue it.

Under the moral code of today the Anglo-Saxon approach was clearly wicked. The Iberian approach was not exactly virtuous, but it came closer to that than the policy followed in the United States which greatly benefited the white population and provided relatively few benefits for the natives. Of course the living standard of the natives was raised, when they stayed alive, by the import of many, many artifacts and customs from the more advanced part of the world. Nevertheless, if I understand the moral code of advanced modern thought, our method violated the current views on proper behavior.

Thus to say that we had a culture different from that of Brazil is certainly true. I believe is also true that these cultural differences are the reasons that we fully developed our natural resources including those in the Mississippi drainage while Brazil did not develop theirs. The emptiness of the Amazon drainage is merely one of many examples. In a

way if we judge by what Wodehouse called “modern advanced thought” our behavior was wicked, or at least lacking in a highly virtuous approach. Since we are here, wealthy and powerful, I presume there are few regrets. We have, of course, acted as if we feel guilty occasionally. We have compensated the Indians by giving them gambling franchises. Since these also are suspect morally, we remain in sin. Personally, I don't mind, perhaps because I am not a proponent of the current ethical fashions. Those of my listeners who are more conventional in their views may be upset by all of this. It is a case where virtue didn't pay and aggression did.