

# ARGENTINA

## FIND OUT

Why were Juan Perón and Eva Perón popular figures?

What role has the military played in Argentina?

What economic challenges does Argentina face?

**Vocabulary** inflation

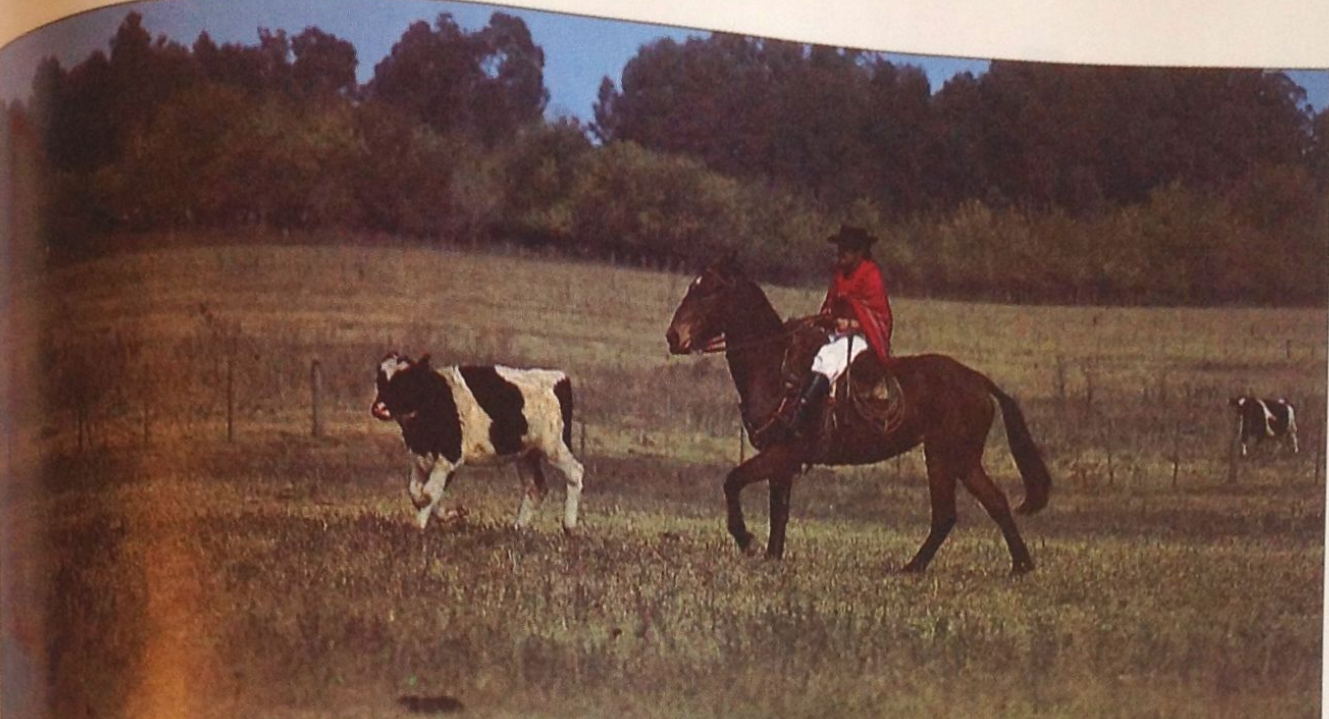
Waving torches above their heads, thousands of workers marched behind a flatbed truck. On it, a huge movie screen showed pictures of a lovely blonde woman wearing elegant silk dresses and diamond jewelry. As the images flashed across the screen, the workers chanted, "*Eva es mi alma y mi corazón.*" ("Eva is my heart and soul.")

Every year, on July 26, workers march through downtown Buenos Aires to honor Eva Perón, the former First Lady of Argentina. "Evita" had risen from poverty to riches. She tried to help the *descamisados*—"shirtless ones"—as working-class people were called. "You, too, will have clothes as rich as mine," she told the poor women of Argentina.

Although she died more than 40 years ago, Eva Perón remains a symbol of hope to many of Argentina's poor. Today, as in the past, the nation's leaders face the challenge of meeting the needs of its large working class.

## Geography and People

In area, Argentina is one of the 10 largest countries in the world. The pampas, a vast fertile plain, stretches across east-central Argentina. There, farmers grow wheat, corn, and sorghum. Huge cattle ranches, called *estancias*, are also scattered across the grasslands. The riches of the pampas make Argentina a leading exporter of food. In addition to its agricultural resources, Argentina has deposits of lead, zinc, and tin.

A photograph showing a gaucho, a traditional Argentine cowboy, riding a dark brown horse through a vast, open grassland. The gaucho is wearing a red poncho and a dark hat. In the foreground, a black and white cow is walking towards the left. Another cow is visible in the distance to the right. The background consists of a line of trees under a clear sky.

**Argentina's Gauchos** Gauchos, or cowboys, tend livestock on ranches throughout the pampas, a vast region of fertile grasslands in South America. Argentina is a leading exporter of food, and its meatpacking is a major industry. **Interdependence** How do cattle ranches like this one link the economy of Argentina to the world economy?

For its large size, Argentina's population is relatively small—only 36 million people. Few people live in the towering Andes in the west or in the bleak southern region of Patagonia. Most people live in the cities. Almost a third of them crowd into Buenos Aires, the capital.

Unlike Ecuador, Peru, and other Latin American nations, Argentina has few Native Americans. Almost all of them were killed in wars with European settlers during the 1800s. Today, about 85 percent of the people in Argentina are of European origin. Most have Spanish or Italian roots. Others trace their families to Germany, Britain, and Eastern Europe. Some immigrants came from Syria, Lebanon, and other parts of the Middle East.

About half of Argentina's population belongs to the middle class, a large percentage for Latin America. Members of the middle class are highly educated and have helped the economy to develop. Many other Argentinians, however, live in poverty in urban or rural areas.

## Political Development

Unlike most countries in Latin America, Argentina enjoyed fairly stable governments from the 1850s to 1930. Since 1930, however, it has faced problems that are common to much of Latin America, including political violence and military rule.

**Perón.** In 1946, a former army colonel, Juan Perón, was elected president. Perón appealed to urban workers by promising higher wages. He won the support of other groups by promoting economic nationalism. As president, he nationalized the railroads, reduced foreign control of businesses, and increased workers' wages.

Eva Perón did much to increase her husband's popularity among the working class. She used persuasion and threats to get "donations" from rich landowners and industrialists. She then gave the money to the poor or used it to build schools and hospitals, as well as to enrich herself. A strong supporter of women's rights, Eva Perón helped women in Argentina win the right to vote in 1947.

Under Juan Perón, the lives of working-class people improved. However, the costly new programs brought the nation to the point of bankruptcy. In addition, Perón severely restricted civil rights and his government was corrupt. Eva Perón's early death in 1952 was an added blow to her husband's popularity. Even as working-class people mourned Evita, the Church and other groups were attacking Juan Perón. As his popularity faded, the army seized power in 1955 and forced Perón into exile.

**The military in power.** Between 1955 and 1983, the military ruled Argentina—sometimes directly and sometimes by controlling elected leaders. The military regularly overthrew civilian governments.

Like other Latin American countries, Argentina suffered from political turmoil during the early 1970s. Left-wing terrorists kidnapped government officials and business leaders. Right-wing death squads killed labor and student leaders. To stop the violence, the army invited an aging Perón to return from exile. He won office in 1973. When he died

the following year, his vice president—and new wife—Isabel Perón, assumed office. She became the first woman in the Americas to become a nation's president.

**The "dirty war."** In 1976, as terrorist attacks worsened, the army again seized power. It launched a brutal campaign, known as the "dirty war," against workers, students, and anyone else it decided was an "enemy of the state." Soldiers arrested and tortured thousands of men and women. As many as 30,000 people "disappeared." They were taken from their homes and never seen again.

The violence turned many people against the nation's military leaders. As the economy faltered, the military launched a different kind of war to regain popular support. In 1982, they seized a cluster of windswept islands about 300 miles (500 km) off the coast of Argentina. Since the 1830s, Britain had ruled the Falkland Islands. Argentina argued that it had an earlier claim to the islands, which they called Las Malvinas.

At first, nationalism led the people to rally behind their leaders. When the British quick-

**At the Plaza de Mayo** In the early 1980s, families of the "disappeared" gathered each week to ask for news. As one mother explained, "When Jorge vanished, my first reaction was to rush out desperately to look for him. . . . Then I realized we had to look for all of them and that we had to stand together because together we were stronger." **Human Rights** Why did these protesters wear masks?



ly regained control of the islands, however, the military lost all popular support.

**Return to democracy.** In 1983, the military permitted free elections. Under President Raúl Alfonsín, democracy was restored in Argentina. At the same time, pressure from the families of those who had “disappeared” mounted. Each Thursday, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo marched in the main plaza of Buenos Aires. Holding photographs of their sons and daughters, they demanded to know what had happened to them. The new government prosecuted a few leaders for crimes committed during the “dirty war.”

In 1989, voters elected a new president. For the first time since 1928, power passed from one civilian leader to another without military interference. Since then, Argentina has had a stable elected government.

## Economic Challenges

Although Argentinians had demonstrated their commitment to democracy, they faced severe economic challenges during the 1980s. Runaway inflation hurt workers and employers alike. **Inflation** is an economic cycle marked by a sharp increase in prices. In 1985, inflation reached almost 1,000 percent in Argentina. Because prices rose from one day to the next, families could not even afford food. People often paid their bills in person because they were afraid prices might rise while their payments were in the mail.

Like Mexico and other Latin American countries, Argentina also owed foreign banks and governments billions of dollars. To combat inflation and ease the debt crisis, the government took drastic steps. It imposed wage and price freezes and laid off thousands of government workers. In addition, it sold the national airline, railroad, and telephone companies to private industries.

In the early 1990s, these harsh economic reforms helped reduce inflation to its lowest level since the 1960s. Although unemployment remained high, the economy generally improved. As the century closed, the people of Argentina looked forward to continued economic growth.

## SECTION 4 REVIEW

1. **Locate:** Falkland Islands.
2. **Identify:** (a) Juan Perón, (b) Eva Perón, (c) “dirty war,” (d) Raúl Alfonsín, (e) Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.
3. **Define:** inflation.
4. What actions did the Perón government take to help the poor?
5. (a) Why did the military seize control in Argentina? (b) What events led to the restoration of democracy?
6. Describe two steps that Argentina has taken to overcome its economic problems.
7. **Forecasting** (a) Do you think that democracy will survive in Argentina? (b) What events might endanger democratic rule?
8. **Writing Across Cultures** In the past, the United States, like Argentina, faced severe inflation. Interview a parent or an older relative about the inflation of the 1970s. Write a paragraph summarizing what you learn about the effects of inflation.

## 5

## BRAZIL

### FIND OUT

- Why is Brazil an ethnically and culturally diverse country?
- What political and economic problems has Brazil faced since the 1930s?
- What difficult choices does Brazil have to make?

**L**ike many Brazilians, Benedita da Silva came from a poor family. When she was a child, she and her family migrated from the country to a favela, or shantytown. While living in the favela, da Silva held a variety of jobs, from market porter to house servant. At the same time, she worked to improve conditions where she lived. She said: