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Urbanisation case history in Peru

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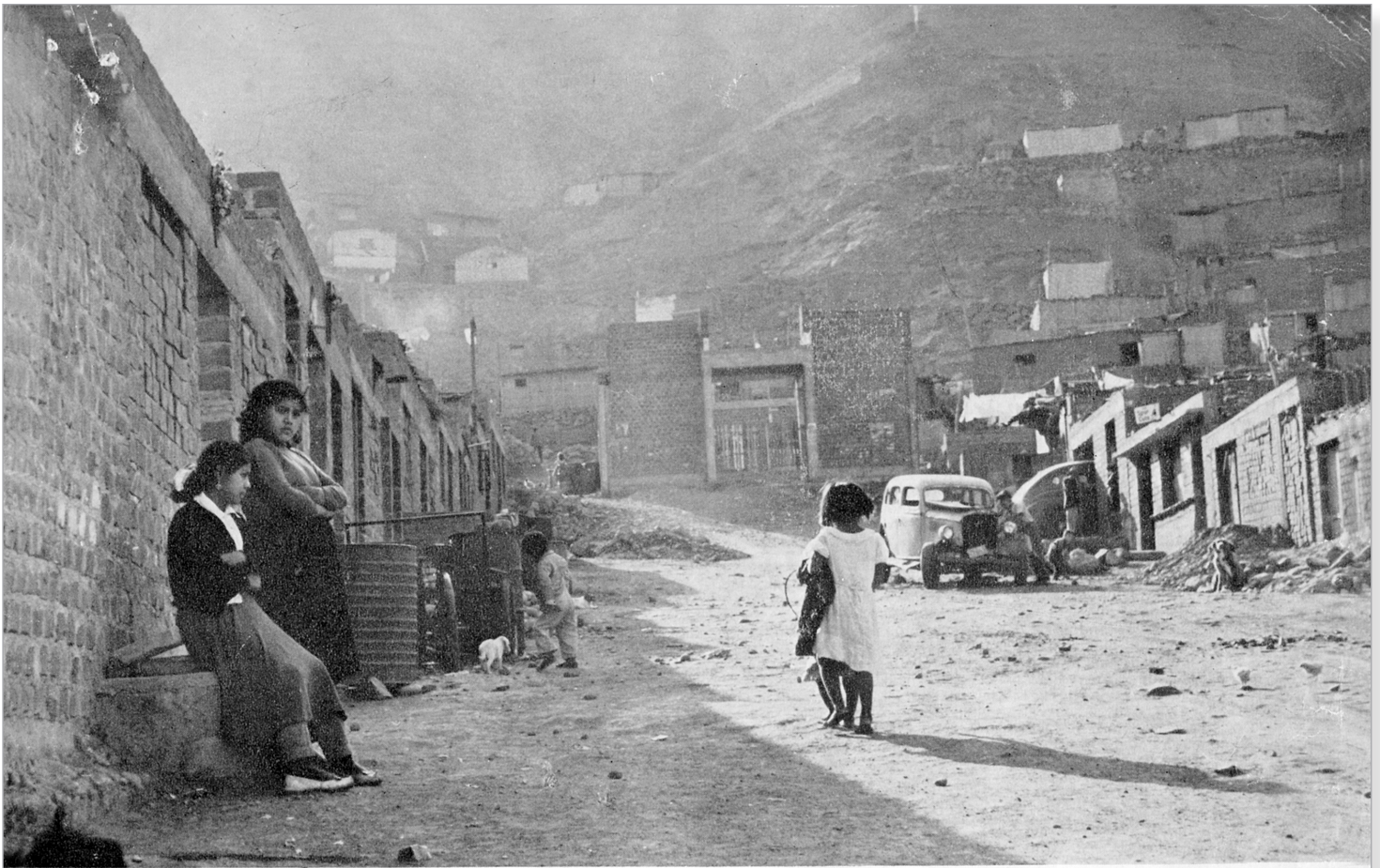


*A hillside  
'barriada', Lima*  
Photo Rojas, by  
courtesy of the Junta  
Nacional de la  
Vivienda (JNV)



*A modern slum  
in Lima*  
Photo John Turner





Above: main street in a Lima 'barriada'  
Below: peasant houses at Vicos, Sierra of Ancash,  
central highlands  
Photos William Mangin



## Urbanisation case history in Peru

William Mangin

There have been big cities in Peru for at least five hundred years and they have grown largely through migration from the hinterland. The tremendous population growth in Peru, together with the centralization of social, political, economic and cultural rewards in Lima, the capital city, has led to recent intensified migration from the provinces to Lima. It is safe to say that at least a million of Lima's two million people were born outside the city. The increase in the numbers of migrants to the city and the subsequent dramatic resettlement of many of them in 'unaided self-help' squatter settlements, 'barriadas' on the banks of the Rimac River and on hillsides surrounding the city, have drawn considerable attention locally and abroad, and for the first time have made many Peruvians aware of the situation. The city has probably grown in the past in much the same way, but the magnitude and the visibility of the recent influx make it seem to be a new phenomenon. The migrants come from practically all regions and all social classes and ethnic groupings in the country.

The composite case-history presented overleaf illustrates some of the human problems encountered in migration to the city and locating and housing a family in a squatter settlement. The couple referred to as Blas and Carmen do exist and their story of moving to the barriada is true.

Some of the details of slum life and house construction in the barriada were drawn from the experiences of other migrants in Lima. None of the people referred to in the text appear in the photographs but the locales are those referred to in the article.





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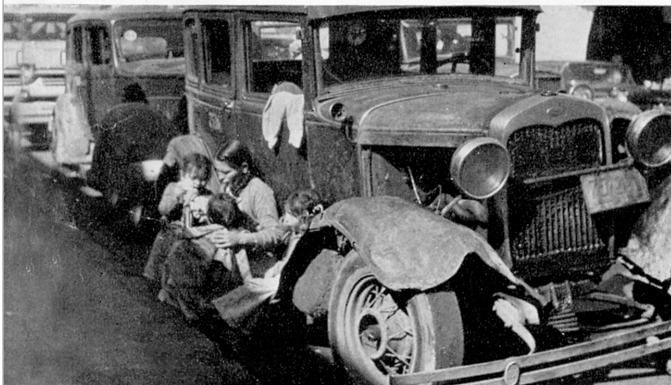
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Fortunato Quispe, a Quechua-speaking Indian from an hacienda in the mountains of Peru, contracted himself out to a coastal sugar plantation for a year's work in order to earn some cash for a religious festival.

After a year on the coast he took a wife and settled down on the plantation leaving his mountain home for good. He and his wife had seven children. When their oldest, Blas, was 18, he found himself with no job, no possibility of schooling, and under pressure from his father to leave and get a job. The small two-room adobe company house was hardly big enough for the parents and the seven children and the sugar company was mechanizing the plantation even as its resident population expanded rapidly. Blas, who had spoken mainly Quechua as a child, was, at 18, fully at home in Spanish. He had visited Lima, the capital city, twice, was an avid radio and movie fan and considered the life of the plantation town dull.

Six months after his eighteenth birthday he and his friend, Antonio, took a truck to the Lima valley and took a bus from the edge of the valley to the city. Having been there before, they knew how to get to the house of an uncle of Antonio's near the wholesale market district. The uncle had heard via the grapevine that they might come. He was renting a three-room house on a crowded alley for his own family of seven, and his maid and her child slept in the small kitchen. He was only able to put them up for one night. They moved into a cheap hotel and pension near the market, and through Antonio's uncle were recruited for a provincial club, Sons of Paucartambo, the native mountain district of Antonio's and Blas' father. Much of their social activity is still with members of the club, and their first orientation to life in Lima was from club members.

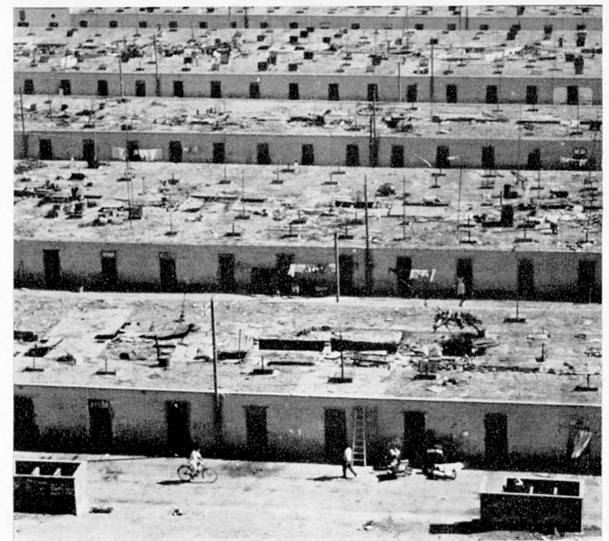
Antonio went to work for his uncle, and Blas, who had been robbed of all his clothing from the hotel, took a job as a waiter and clean-up man in a modest boarding house catering to medical and engineering students. He worked six-and-a-half days a week in the pension, taking Thursday nights and Sunday afternoons off. During his first year he saved a little money. He impregnated a maid from a neighbouring house, Carmen, and agreed to marry her sometime. Meanwhile, they rented a two-room, one-storey adobe house in a large lot not far from the boarding house. The lot was packed solidly with similar houses and the walks between them were about five feet wide. They had filthy, constantly clogged common baths and water taps for every ten houses and the



rent was high. They paid extra for electricity and for practically non-existent city services.

Through a relative of one of the students Blas got a better job as a waiter in a rather expensive restaurant. In spite of the distance and the extra money spent for transportation it paid to take the job. With the arrival of a second child plus a boost in their rent, they found themselves short of money even though Blas' job was quite a good one for a person of his background.

Carmen, Blas' common law wife, had come to Lima at the age of fourteen from the southern highland province of Ayacucho. She had been sent by her mother and step-father to work as a servant in the house of a Lima dentist, who was also a land-owner in Ayacucho, and Carmen was to receive no pay. The dentist promised to 'educate' her but, in fact, she was not only not allowed to go to school but was rarely allowed outside the house. During her third year with the dentist's family her mother, who had left her stepfather in Ayacucho, rescued her from the dentist's house after a terrible row. Her mother then found a maid's job for Carmen where she was paid. Carmen worked in several private houses



Above, top: Huaraz market, Sierra of Ancash in the central highlands

Photo William Mangin

Above: company housing on a coastal plantation

Photo John Turner

Left: migrant family in Lima market area

Below: street in Lima market area

Photos William Mangin







in the next few years and loaned a large part of her earnings to her mother. Blas was her first serious suitor. Previously she had had little experience with men and when Blas asked her to come and live with him after she became pregnant, she was surprised and pleased.

In her own crowded house with Blas and their son she was happier than she had been since her early childhood with her grandmother. Although her work was hard, it was nothing like the work she had done in the houses in Lima. They were poor but Blas had steady work and they ate better than she had in any of her previous homes. Her infrequent arguments with Blas were usually over money. He had once hit her when she had loaned some of the rent money to her mother, but, on the whole, she considered herself well-treated and relatively lucky in comparison with many of her neighbours.

She did not have too much to do with her neighbours, mostly longer-time residents of Lima than she, and she was afraid of the Negroes in the area, having been frightened as a child in the mountains by stories of Negro monsters who ate children. She found herself being drawn into arguments over petty complaints about children trespassing, dogs barking and messing the sidewalk, husband's relative success or failure, mountain Indian traits as opposed to coastal Mestizo traits, etc. She was mainly occupied with her son and her new baby daughter, and the constant arguing annoyed Blas more than it did Carmen. Blas had also been disturbed by the crowded conditions. There was no place for the children to play and the petty bickering over jurisdiction of the small sidewalk was a constant irritant. Thievery was rampant and he had even lost some of his clothes since they had to hang the washing outside above the alley. In Lima's damp climate, it often takes several days to dry clothes even partially.

He had been thinking of moving and, although Carmen was settled into a more or less satisfactory routine, she was interested as well. They carried on for another year and another child without taking any action. When their landlord told them that he was planning to clear the lot and build a cinema within six months, they decided to move. A colleague of Blas' in the restaurant had spoken to him about a group to which he belonged. The members were organizing an invasion of state land to build houses and they wanted fifty families. The group had been meeting irregularly for about a year and when Blas was invited they had forty of the fifty they sought.

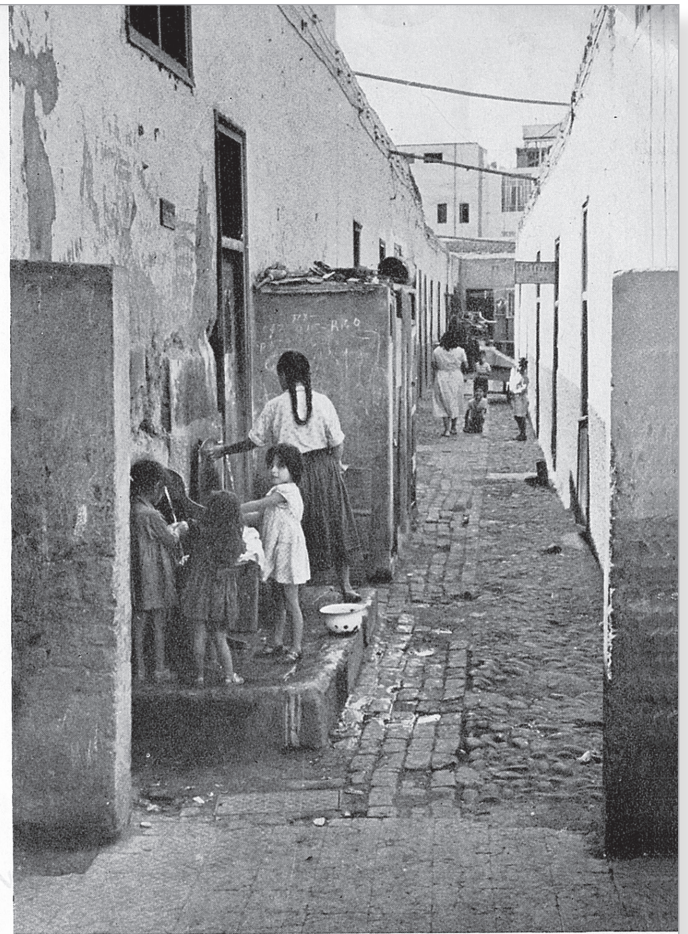
The waiter's group came mainly from the same central highland region and their spokesman and leader was a bank employee who was also a functionary of the bank employees' union. The other major faction was a group of career army enlisted men, including several members of a band that plays at state functions, who were stationed near the proposed invasion site. About half of the group had been recruited as Blas was. Blas himself recruited a neighbour and another family from the Sons of Paucartambo, to which he still belonged.

They met a few times with never more than fifteen men present. They were encouraged by the fact that the government seemed to be tolerating squatter invasions. Several earlier invasion attempts had been blocked by the police and in many *barriadas* people had been beaten, some shot, and a few killed. The recent attitude, in 1954, seemed tolerant, but under a dictatorship, or under any government, the law is apt to be administered whimsically and their planned invasion was illegal. Another factor pointing to haste was the loss of seven of their families who had found housing some other way. Blas was one of those suggesting that they move fast because his eviction date was not far off.

Many *barriada* invasions had been arranged for the eve of a religious or national holiday. Their invasion site was near the area used once a year, in June, for a grand popular folk-music festival, so they decided to wait until that was over. The next holiday was the Independence Day vacation, July 28th, 29th, 30th; so they picked the night of the 27th. It would give them a holiday to provide a patriotic aura as well as three days off from work to consolidate their position. They thought of naming their settlement after the dictator's popular wife, but, after taking into account the vicissitudes of current politics, they decided to write to her about their pitiful plight, but to name the place after a former general-dictator, long dead, who freed the slaves.

A letter was drawn up for mailing to the dictator's wife and for presentation to the press. The letter stressed equally their respect for the government and their abandonment by the government. They had no hesitation about wringing the most out of the clichés concerning their status as humble, abandoned, lost, helpless and disillusioned but always patriotic servants of the fatherland.

During the last month word was passed from the active meeting-goers, still never more than 20 or 25, to the others and preparations were made. Each family bought its own straw mats and poles for the house, and small groups made arrangements for trucks and taxis. Each household was asked to get a Peruvian flag or make one of paper. No two remember the details of the invasion the same way, but about thirty of the expected forty-five families did invade during the night. A newspaper photographer was notified by the invaders and he arrived about the time the houses were being finished. The members had discussed previously what lots they would take, and how the streets were to be laid out and there was very little squabbling during the first day. By early morning when the police arrived there were at least thirty one-room straw houses flying Peruvian flags and the principal streets were outlined with stones.



Above: access alley in a Lima slum

Below: organizing committee of a 'barriada'.

Photos John Turner

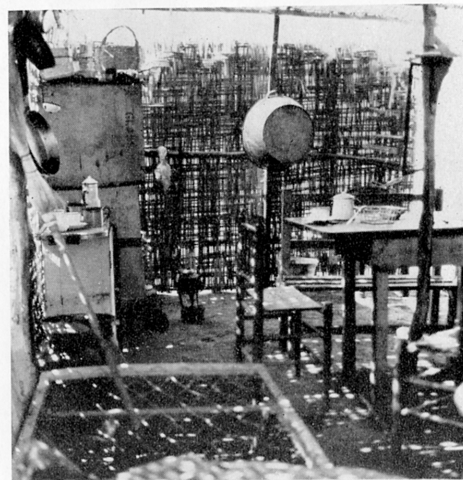
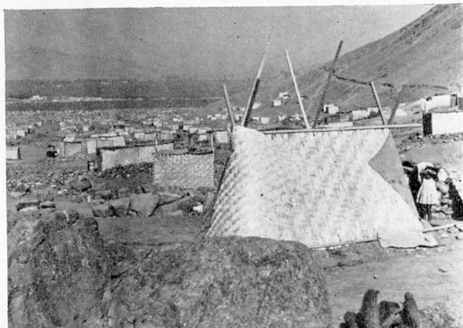






Above: sales yard for Lima 'barriada' house elements; mats and poles for the structure  
Photo William Mangin

Below: 'barriada' El Ermitaño, Lima, at early stage  
Bottom: interior of a straw shack at El Ermitaño  
Photos E. Levitus



## Urbanisation case history in Peru

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The police told them they would have to leave. A picture and story appeared in two papers and by the 30th of July about twenty or thirty more families had come, including some of the old members. A few men, with the help of friends and relatives and, in at least one case, paid workers, had built brick walls around their lots. These families and a few other early arrivals, most of whom are still in the *barriada* in 1963, proudly refer to themselves as the original invaders and tend to exaggerate the opposition they faced. They were told to leave several times but no-one forced them. A resident, not one of the original invaders, was killed by the police in 1960 during an attempt to build a school on government land. The unfavourable publicity caused the government to desist and the residents cut a lot out of the hillside and built a school.

Blas and Carmen picked a lot about fifteen by thirty metres on the gradual slope of the hill on the principal street. The lot was somewhat larger than most subsequent lots, an advantage of being an original invader.

Blas and some friends quickly expanded the simple invasion one-room house to a three-room straw mat house and they outlined the lot with stones. He worked hard on Sundays and some nights, sometimes alone, sometimes with friends from the *barriada* or from outside. He soon managed to get a brick wall six-and-a-half feet high round his property.

Many of the residents of *barriadas* hurry to erect the walls around their lots and then take anywhere from one year to five or ten to finish the house. After about a year of working on the lot and making his 'plan', Blas decided to contract a 'specialist' to help him put up walls for four rooms. He paid for the materials brought by the 'specialist' and helped out on the job. When the walls were done he roofed the rooms with cane, bricked up the windows and put in cement floors. With his first pay cheque, after finishing paying for the walls, Blas made a down payment on a large, elaborate cedar door costing about \$45. With the installation of the door and wooden windows they finally felt like homeowners. They even talked of getting formally married.

About two years later, after a particularly damp winter during which his children were frequently sick, he decided to hire another 'specialist' to help him put on a concrete roof. He hired a neighbour who had put on other roofs and he found out that the first 'specialist' had sold him faulty cement and had also erected the walls in such a way that it would be difficult to put on a roof. It took considerable money, time and energy to rectify the mistakes and put on the roof, but when it was done it was a good job and strong enough to support a second floor some day. Meanwhile a straw mat room has been erected on the roof and Blas helps out with the houses of friends and neighbours against the day he will ask them to help with his second floor.

Skilled bricklayers and concreters abound in *barriadas* and the bulk of the construction in these places is cheaper than on contracted houses. Much of it is done through informal mutual aid arrangements and when contractors are hired they are generally very closely supervised. There is considerable cheating by contractors on materials and many of the specialists hired for roofing and electrical and plumbing installations are not competent. Transport of materials is often expensive but the personal concern of the builder often results in lower prices at purchase. Some *barriadas* have electricity from the central power plant and public water; the one in this story does not. The front room/shop combination they have in their house is not only fairly common in *barriadas* but throughout the provincial area of Peru.

Their principal room fronts on the street and doubles as a shop which Carmen and the oldest children tend. Blas is still a waiter and they now have five children. The saving on rent and the income from the shop make them considerably more prosperous than before, but, in spite of their spectacular view of the bright lights of the centre of Lima some twenty minutes away, Carmen has never seen the Plaza San Martín and has passed through the central business district on the bus only a few times. She has never been inside the restaurant where Blas works. She gets along with most of her neighbours and has the company and assistance of a fifteen-year-old half-sister deposited with her by her mother.

Blas and Carmen have a television set which runs on electricity bought from a private motor owner and they are helping to pay for it by charging their neighbours a small amount to watch. It also brings some business to the store.

Carmen and Blas bemoan the lack of sewage disposal, running water and regular electricity in the *barriada* and they complain about the dust from the unpaved streets.

They are also critical of the ramshackle auxiliary bus which serves them, but, on the whole, they are not dissatisfied with their situation. They own a house which is adequate, Blas has steady work, their oldest children are in school, and Blas has been on the elected committee that runs *barriada* affairs and feels that he has some say in local government. Since local elections are unknown in Peru the *barriadas'* unofficial elections are unique. The committee passes judgement on requests from new applicants to settle in the *barriada* and cut new lots out of the





hillside. They also decide on requests to sell or rent. Renting is against the rules of the association. Another important function is presenting petitions and requests to various government ministries for assistance. Until 1960 *barriada* residents had no legal basis for their ownership of lots. Any recognition by the government in the form of assistance or even taxation was an assuring sign. In 1960 the congress passed a law saying, in effect, that what could not be changed might as well be made legal, and residents of *barriadas* are to be given their lots. As of 1963 a few land titles had been given out by the government, but the people have been buying and selling for years with home-made titles.

The committees are also concerned with internal order. *Barriadas* are ordinarily quiet places composed mainly of hard-working family groups, but the public image is one of violence, immorality, sloth, crime and revolutionary left-wing politics. *Barriada* residents are quite sensitive about this and the committees try to screen out potential trouble makers and control those present. They also try to get as much publicity as possible for the productive work done by *barriada* people.

The experience of this couple is probably happier than that of the average family but is certainly well within the 'typical' range. They feel, in comparison to people like themselves and in terms of their own aspirations, that they have done well. When asked what they would do if they acquired a large sum of money, they both answer in terms of improving their present property and educating their children. There is some resentment of the children, and Blas beats the oldest boy for not doing well in school, and all five children are bedwetters, but they give the impression of a happy family and, although Carmen cried during several interviews, they smile frequently and seem to be getting along. Carmen speaks some Quechua with her neighbours and her half-sister, and has actually improved her Quechua since coming to the *barriada*. Spanish is the principal language, however, and neither she nor Blas have any strong interest in their children learning Quechua.

The children themselves learn some Quechua but they speak Spanish with their peers, and in a group of children it is difficult to distinguish those of recently arrived near-Indian migrants from those of the most *Criollo* coastal families. There is a certain amount of antagonism among the adult *barriada* dwellers over race, cultural difference, politics, and place of origin. The children, however, are strikingly similar in attitude and have very little of the mountain Indian about them.



House of a founder member of a 'barriada', Lima  
Photo William Mangin

The situation of Blas and Carmen is similar to that of many others. They have some friends, some relatives and some income, but they could be ruined by a loss of job or any chronic illness of Blas, and they are aware of it. If there is a potentially disruptive factor in their lives it is that the high aspirations they have for their children are vastly unrealistic. They are sacrificing and plan to sacrifice more for the education of the children, but they overrate the probable results. They say they want the children to be professionals, doctors, teachers, people with comfortable lives, and in this they are similar to most interviewed *barriada* families. But it is highly unlikely that they will be, unless there are monumental and rapid changes in Peru.

When the children come to this realization they may fulfil the presently paranoid prophecy of many middle and upper class Peruvians who see the *barriada* population as rebellious and revolutionary.

Aerial view of a 'barriada'  
Photo A. Rojas, by courtesy of the JNV

