

The Mission (1986), with Jeremy Irons and Robert de Niro

This movie is set in the mid-1700s in the beautiful border region between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, traditional home to the Guaraní indigenous peoples. The Jesuit order, present in South America since the late 1500s and protected within Spanish colonial territories, has established a number of missions ('Reductions') to protect indigenous converts from being forced into slavery, a practice officially sanctioned by Portugal and unofficially tolerated by Spain. The 1750 Treaty of Madrid, however, redraws territorial boundaries in the region, and the future of existing Jesuit missions that will now fall under direct Portuguese control – and indeed, the continued presence of the Jesuit order in South America as well as the fate of the Guaraní themselves – hang in the balance.