***Latin America***

Cultural Characteristics

Indian Civilizations

      Occupied South and Central America before conquest by Spanish

      Pyramids:  Many ancient ruins still visible throughout Latin America

      Native religions, often practiced human sacrifice

      Incas—occupied Andes Mountains from Peru to Chile

        --Machu Picchu—Incan city high in the Andes Mountains; religious purposes

      Mayas—occupied Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico and Guatemalan rainforests

        --Tikal—ancient Mayan city; used as the set of many Hollywood movies

      Aztecs—occupied area around current Mexico City

        --Tenochtitlan—Aztec capital built in the middle of a lake

        --The word “Mexico” comes from a native translation of the word “Aztec”

African Traditions

      Many African cultural traditions (music, etc.) influence life throughout the Caribbean where many Africans were relocated during the age of the slave trade

Influence of European Colonization

      Language—Spanish is major language

      Religion—dominant religion is Roman Catholic

      Ethnicity—mestizos are mixture of Spanish and indigenous peoples

      Much of Latin America colonized by Spain

      Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands also colonized smaller areas of Central and South America as well as many Caribbean Islands

Predominance of Roman Catholic Religion

      Much of Latin America is Roman Catholic (Christian)

      Many native cultures converted to Catholicism after their god-kings were captured by the Spanish

      Cathedrals found throughout Latin America

Rigid Social Structure

      Haciendas—large ranches owned by the extremely wealthy; poor peasants work the land; this system prevents social advancement

      Ejidos (communal land)—land owned by the government; people work the land to provide food for community; people paid for their work; national bank pays for farming equipment

Mestizos

      Major ethnic group made up of people of mixed Spanish/Native American descent

Populated Areas

      Coastal settlements in South America (Rio, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sao Paulo, etc.)

      Remainder of South America is sparsely populated

      Mexico City, coastal areas are densely populated

      Many Caribbean islands are densely populated

Megacities

      Huge cities and the surrounding urban areas; often overpopulated

      Squatter settlements:  poor slum areas surrounding megacities; often comprised of poorly built dwellings built illegally; problems in these areas:  crime, gangs, drugs

Mexico City

      Most heavily populated megacity in Western Hemisphere

      Heavily polluted—heavy reliance on automobiles; ineffective public transportation system

      Built on site of ancient Aztec capital Tenochtitlan

      Surrounded by volcanoes; often affected by earthquakes

      Traffic, poverty, pollution; as many as 50,000 “street children” (homeless children)

      Violent crime (2nd worst city in the world for violent crime)

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

      Overurbanized—massive slums (favelas) surround the city; drug and gang problems

      Former capital city; Brasilia built to relieve overpopulation

      Remarkable topography—beaches, harbor, mountains

      Christ the Redeemer statue

Buenos Aires, Argentina

      Capital and thriving port city

Santiago, Chile

      Capital and major trade city

      Located in central valley amidst the Andes Mountains

      Pollution problem; river that flows through it is full of pollution from copper mines and industrial and household sewage

Rapid Population Growth

      Poverty is rural areas has led to overurbanization

      Fertility rates are very high in poorest countries

Out-Migration

      Many people leave Latin American countries for areas of better opportunity, such as the United States

Music

      African influences

      Calypso

      Steel drum bands

      Reggae

Traditional Dances

      Samba

      Rumba

      Cha-Cha

      Tango