

Latin America's History
(Conflict & Change)

SS6H1: Explain conflict and change in Latin America.

a. Describe the influence of African slavery on the development of the Americas.

- With the rapid expansion of European influence into the New World, the need for a cheap and steadily - available labor force to establish and maintain colonial industries and infrastructure –particularly as relates to the cultivation and exportation of sugarcane and coffee – was crucial. Spanish and Portuguese landowners at first sought such a labor force among the conquered indigenous populations of Latin America; however, the arrival of Europeans in the New World brought with it a number of virulent diseases (e.g., small pox) which decimated native populations. As such the Spanish and Portuguese began importing slave labor from West Africa in what became known as the transatlantic slave trade.
- Sanitation and living conditions on the many slave ships, which brought black Africans to the Americas, were deplorable; the mortality rate on such journeys was typically 25%. This black African slave labor force was impressed into agricultural work on plantations and haciendas throughout Latin America, as well as in gold and diamond mines in Brazil.
- Although slavery was abolished in Europe in the early 19th century, it persisted in Latin America through the 1880s, most notably in Cuba and Brazil. Over time intermarriage among those of Spanish and Portuguese ancestry with indigenous peoples and black Africans gave rise to a new cultural identity in Latin America which prevails today.

Hacienda: Spanish agricultural plantations throughout Latin America during the colonial period.

Indigenous: Term referring to the native peoples or species of a given place; synonymous with Aboriginal.

New World: General term used to describe the newly discovered Americas during the European Age of Exploration; this is in contrast to the “Old World” of the eastern hemisphere, particularly Europe.

Transatlantic Slave Trade: The enslavement and forced transportation of 12-15 million black Africans to the Americas between the 15th and 19th centuries; associated terms include the triangular trade and the middle passage across the Atlantic.

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b. Describe the influence of the Spanish and the Portuguese on the language and religions of Latin America.

- The Colombian Exchange, which began with Christopher Columbus in 1492, was not merely a question of agricultural commodities exchange between Europe and the Americas. This 15th century example of globalization was also cultural in scope. The diffusion of Iberian languages and religious beliefs throughout Latin America during the colonial period has had an indelible impact on the development of the region.
- In terms of language, both Spanish and Portuguese are classified as Romance languages, meaning they derive from the Latin language once used throughout the Roman Empire in

Latin America's History (Conflict & Change)

Europe. Although grammatically similar, the two languages are quite different from one another phonetically and structurally.

- The influence of Spanish is most pronounced throughout Mexico, Central America (except Belize), northern and western South America, and the western Caribbean. There are more Spanish-speakers in Mexico today than there are in Spain itself.
- Portuguese, meanwhile, is the official language of Brazil. Although Spanish is spoken in more individual countries throughout South America, Portuguese is the most-spoken language on the continent given Brazil's estimated 208 million population.
- Both Spain and Portugal were officially Roman Catholic kingdoms during the age of exploration and colonization, and as such both promoted the Christian faith throughout their respective Latin American colonies. As a result, the region remains heavily Christianized today.

Colombian Exchange: The movement of peoples, agricultural commodities, diseases, and cultures between the Old World and New World during the European Age of Exploration.

Globalization: Process of interaction and integration among various parts of the world through commercial and cultural exchange.

Iberian: Referring to the nations and cultures of Europe's Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Portugal.

Roman Catholic: The largest denomination of Christianity in the world to date.

Romance languages: Referring to the languages and cultural characteristics which evolved out of the Latin-speaking Roman Empire.

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c. Explain the impact of the Cuban Revolution and describe the current relationship between Cuba and the United States

- Prior to 1959, Cuba was a relatively American-friendly nation. Although the island had languished under the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista since 1952, U.S. investment on the island was booming – particularly with regard to the sugar industry.
- All of this changed on 1 January 1959 when Fidel Castro seized power and declared the island a communist state. All American owned property on the island – as well as all Cuban-owned private businesses, factories, and farmland – was declared the property of the state. Basic personal freedoms of expression were suspended; media outlets were shut down; even churches were closed and their property seized.
- In response to Castro's repressive takeover, the United States placed an economic embargo on Cuba, which blocked the island's sugar exports to American markets. This action was countered by the Soviet Union, who became fast friends with the new Cuban leadership, agreeing to purchase its sugarcane as well as provide the Castro regime with weapons and military training.
- Although the Castro regime did provide improvements to education and healthcare, civil rights on the island were severely restricted. And, as one might expect, having a communist state situated so close to American soil – there are only 90 miles lying between Cuba and Key West, Florida – did not sit well with the U.S. government.
- In a watershed moment of the Cold War, the Cuban government agreed to allow the U.S.S.R. to build a missile launching complex on the island, as well as house a substantial

Latin America's History (Conflict & Change)

- complement of intermediate and medium-range ballistic missiles there. This was discovered by U.S. intelligence in 1962, sparking a thirteen-day standoff known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev argued that the placement of missiles in Cuba was aimed at countering the presence of American Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey. The Soviet government also claimed the move was in response to the failed American-backed coup against Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs one year earlier.
 - Although the Kennedy administration diffused the situation through diplomatic means, the Cuban Missile Crisis was arguably the closest the world – up to that point – had ever come to a Third World War.
 - U.S.-Cuban relations remained tense for the next half-century. Only recently have diplomatic relations been normalized between the United States and Cuba. Each nation reopened its embassy in the other's capital in July 2015. The U.S. eased trade restrictions on Cuba in January 2016. Two months later, Barack Obama became the first U.S. president to visit Cuba in 88 years. In addition, the decades-old American policy of permitting Cuban nationals to immigrate to the United States without a visa was suspended as of January 2017.

Batista, Fulgencio: former president and later dictator of Cuba prior to the 1959 Cuban Revolution
Castro, Fidel: former communist dictator of Cuba who led the ouster of Fulgencio Batista in the 1959 Cuban Revolution

Cold War: sociopolitical, military, and economic conflict between the world's Western capitalist democracies (i.e., Western Europe and the United States) and its Eastern communist regimes (i.e., the USSR and China) from the end of World War II through 1991

Communist: an economic system wherein private ownership is largely forbidden and all industries and resources are under the control of the state

Coup: the act of overthrowing an existing governing authority

Cuban Missile Crisis: 1962 Cold War event wherein the Soviet Union, with the agreement of the Castro regime, placed intermediate and medium-range ballistic missiles on the island of Cuba which were capable of striking the United States

Embargo: economic policy which blocks all trade with a given nation, typically due to safety and/or humanitarian concerns; embargoes are also enacted to sanction enemy nations

Kennedy, John F.: president of the United States at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Khrushchev, Nikita: leader of the Soviet Union at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Soviet Union: abridged name used to describe the former communist government of Russia during Cold War; also known as the U.S.S.R.

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d. Explain the impact of poverty, the war on drugs, and migration to the United States on Latin America

- There are several prevailing socioeconomic issues which affect the lives and livelihoods of Latin Americans. These same issues have also had a dramatic impact on the development – or the underdevelopment – of the region as a whole.
- Rampant poverty is a major concern throughout Latin America as a whole. Even in the case of Brazil – a BRICS nation and one of the region's fastest growing economies – the

Latin America's History (Conflict & Change)

level of rural poverty is over 50%. In a region of nearly 650 million people, one in five lives in chronic poverty. This is due largely to a regional lack of high-quality, high-skill employment opportunities as well as insufficient investment in and access to education. Over half of 15-year-olds in Latin America are functionally illiterate; math and science competency scores across the region are especially low. Such sobering statistics make it easy to understand why the region is struggling economically.

- Most of Latin America was once dubbed the “Third World”; however, since the end of the Cold War, the term “developing nation” is more commonly used to describe many of the countries found in this region.
- The war on drugs throughout Latin America is another issue depressing regional development. Cocaine production is most pronounced in the Andean region of South America (i.e., Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia), with Central America (particularly Guatemala) and Mexico serving as the corridor through which the trade is funneled into the United States. U.S.-backed efforts to inhibit regional drug trafficking, such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and Plan Colombia, have only been marginally successful. This is due in large part to government corruption and collusion with the various drug cartels of the region. Civilian casualties in Latin America associated with narco-terrorism number in the tens of thousands.
- Between the war on drugs and the general lack of economic opportunities in the region, many Latinos have emigrated to the United States in search of safer living conditions and stabler work environments. This pattern of mass migration to the U.S., particularly over the last two decades, has occurred both through legal naturalization as well as illegal immigration via the nearly 2,000-mile long U.S.-Mexico border. Government corruption, minimal job and education opportunities, and narcotics-driven gang violence have contributed to an unprecedented surge in unaccompanied Central American minors entering the U.S. since 2011. Latinos at present make up the largest minority group in the United States.

Andean: geographic term for countries located along the Andes mountain range of South America

BRICS: political science term used for the world's five fastest-growing economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

Cartel: a group which dominates the trade of a specific product or service

Cold War: period of time, from the end of World War II until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, characterized by frequent military and diplomatic rows between the United States and U.S.S.R.

Emigrate: to relocate to a new country for the purpose of employment

Latino: general term for those with Latin American ancestry from a Spanish-speaking country

Narco-terrorism: violent extremism associated with the illegal drug trade, particularly as relates to cocaine or heroin

Naturalization: the process by which a citizen of one country may become a legal citizen of another country

Rural: an area that is largely countryside; this is in contrast to an urban (i.e., city) area

Trafficking: the illegal smuggling of people or products (especially drugs or weapons)