

Latin America Study Guide

Geography

- Physical Features: Pacific Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, Panama Canal, Amazon River, Andes Mountains, Atacama Desert, and Sierra Madre Mountains
- Political Features: Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia
- Brazil is about 80 times the size of Cuba.
- Brazil has a much larger population than Cuba.
- The ecology of Brazil's rainforest is most threatened by the cutting down of trees (known as clear-cutting and deforestation) and logging in the rainforest.
- Mexico has an air pollution problem because of its geographical location lying in a bowl-shaped valley that is surrounded by the Sierra Madre Mountains and volcanoes.
- Lake Maracaibo is the largest lake in South America. However, the eastern shore is dropping about 3 inches each year due to oil related pollution in Venezuela.
- The Andes Mountains affect trade by making it difficult and limits the amount trade that can be taken place.
- Brazil is the only Latin American country whose language and culture have been greatly influenced by Portugal.
- Latin America and the Caribbean are very diverse, culturally-blended areas. One reason for this diversity is the intermarriage of European settlers and indigenous people.
- Mulattoes are a blending of European and Africans.
- Mestizos are a blending of Europeans and Natives.
- Creoles are Europeans born in the New World.
- Cultural diffusion is the spreading (sharing) of different cultures and ideas.

History

- Spain had the most significant impact on the language and religion of Latin America. It can still be seen today because most people in the countries that were originally colonized by Spain are predominately Roman Catholic.
- In the 1500s, the Aztec civilization was conquered by conquistadors led by Hernán Cortes (AKA: Hernando Cortes).
- In the 1500s, the Inca civilization was conquered by Spanish soldiers led by Francisco Pizarro.
- Cortes and Pizarro were able to conquer the Aztecs and the Incas because European diseases killed many natives who might have fought the Spanish.
- The Columbian Exchange is the exchange of animals, plants, people, and diseases from the Old World to the New World and from the New World to the Old World.
- The African Slave Trade grew because European nations wanted the captured Africans to work on the plantations in their colonies.
- After a ten-year struggle, Haiti was able to gain its independence from France in 1804 because Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave led a revolt and was successful.
- In the 1800s, Miguel Hidalgo, the father of the independence movement in Mexico, inspired people to rise up against Spain to fight for their independence.
- Simon Bolivar, "the liberator" led Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Panama, and Ecuador in their successful fight for independence against Spain.
- The United States put an embargo in place when Cuba took over property owned by Americans.
- The Cuban Missile Crisis almost started a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was when Fidel Castro allowed the Soviet Union to build a nuclear missile launch complex in Cuba.

- The Soviet Union supported Cuba until 1991.
- The Zapatistas did not like NAFTA because they thought it would cause poor Mexican farmers to go out of business, and it would increase poverty among the indigenous people rather than reduce it.

Government

- An autocratic government would most likely abolish all opposing political parties, the direct election of leaders, and free speech.
- A federal government is where power is divided between the central government and small divisions, such as states.
- An oligarchy is a government that is ruled by a small group of people.
- In a democratic nation, citizens can best influence the government by voting.
- A confederation is a small group of countries that government and membership is voluntary.
- A Unitary government has a central government that operates at all levels of government in a country.
- Mexico's government is a federal republic.
- Cuba has a type of government in which the ruler has absolute power and is not restricted by a constitution, laws, or citizens. Cuba's government can be best described as a dictatorship.

Economy

- The North American Free Trade Agreement was designed to promote free trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.
- The purpose of NAFTA is to increase trade by doing away with tariffs.
- Tariffs are tax on imports.
- The purpose of a protective tariff is to increase the prices of imported goods and protect a country's own industries from foreign competition.
- An advantage in Specialization is a factory can produce more goods in less time for less money.
- People want to exchange currency in order to buy and sell goods and services with other countries that have different currencies.
- Education is an example of human capital.
- An entrepreneur can help increase a country's GDP by creating businesses that give people jobs.
- A country with a high literacy rate will most likely have a high standard of living.
- A market economy is an economic system in which people – not the government – own land, factories, and businesses. Companies produce the goods of their choice and the consumers decide whether to buy the goods.
- Competition is found in a market economy because a person can start any legal business and charge any price.
- In a traditional economic system, people usually exchange goods or services rather than use money. Bartering with a seller is an example of this exchange process.
- Oil and tourism are major sources of income in both Mexico and Venezuela.
- One problem with depending on oil exports for most of a country's income is when the price of oil goes down, the country begins to run low on money.
- Cuba and Brazil compete with each other for trade with other countries in coffee, sugar, and tourism.
- Canada and Mexico are similar in that lowering trade barriers between these two nations has resulted in both nations experiencing growth in their economies.