**Latin American Environment**

**SS6G2 The student will discuss environmental issues in Latin America.** a. Explain the major environmental concerns of Latin America regarding the issues of air pollution in Mexico City, Mexico, the destruction of the rain forest in Brazil, and oil-related pollution in Venezuela.

**Air Pollution in Mexico City**

In the early twentieth century, Mexico City was known for its clear skies and views of distant snowcapped mountains. Today, Mexico City is known as one of the world’s worst areas of air pollution. The air is so bad that children are more likely to have breathing problems and develop lung disease when they grow up. Older adults must stay indoors and limit activity. Plants and animals are dying more quickly than usual since there is no clean air to breathe; there have actually been reports of birds falling out of the sky, dead. On most days, the hazy, polluted sky blocks the view to the mountains.

The city is crowded. Over 19 million people live in Mexico City. That’s more than twice the number of people who live in the whole state of Georgia. There are thousands of factories and over 3 million cars in Mexico City. The factories and cars send pollution such as lead, sulfur dioxide, and carbon monoxide into the air. Many of the cars are older models. These older cars produce even more pollution than typical new cars.

Geography plays a role in the problems the city faces. The city is built in a bowl-shaped crater of an extinct volcano. Mexico City sits in between several mountains. Since the city is surrounded by mountains, air pollution cannot rise high enough to escape the city. Air pollution becomes much more concentrated in Mexico City than in cities in which air pollution can escape.

Mexico City is working on several solutions to this problem. First, drivers must leave their cars at home one day each week. Citizens are encouraged to ride buses and trains or carpool to work. Cars are inspected more often. Cars with very bad exhaust problems must be repaired. On the days of the highest pollution levels, certain factories can be closed.

**Destruction of the Rain Forest in Brazil**

Brazil is the largest country in South America, and the fifth largest country in the world, by land area and by population. More than half the country is covered by rain forest. This jungle environment is home to more than 40,000 different kinds of plants and thousands of types of animals. Trees in the forest can soar up to 150 feet in the air. The Amazon River and other large rivers carry water from the rain forests across Brazil and into the Atlantic Ocean.

The rain forests of Brazil are valuable in many ways. In the rain forest, humans have found plants that are used to make medicines that cure diseases. The trees themselves can be sold as timber. The forest serves another purpose—creating oxygen! It is estimated that 20% of the world’s oxygen is produced in the rain forests of the Amazon region.

**Latin American Environment**

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**Destruction of the Rain Forest in Brazil (continued)**

Brazil is also home to some native populations that depend on the forest. Many of these rain forest people have had little to no contact with the outside world. They maintain their traditional way of life. These people depend on the forest for their food, clothing, shelter, and spiritual life.

This beautiful and important environment is threatened by human activity. Many Brazilians live in poor conditions. One way the people get money for their families is to clear the forest and sell the timber. Humans use chain saws and bulldozers to clear large areas of the forest and haul away the trees. This process is known as **deforestation.** The cleared land can be used to start cattle ranches or farms to grow crops.

**Latin American Culture**

**SS6G4 The student will describe the cultural characteristics of people who live in Latin America and the Caribbean.** a. Describe the results of blending of ethnic groups in Latin America and the Caribbean b. Explain why Latin America is a region based on the languages of Portuguese and Spanish. c. Evaluate how the literacy rate affects the standard of living.

**Language and Religion in Latin America**

The cultures of Latin America are diverse. Each region has its own character, which reflects its history. The languages, customs, beliefs, and even the foods from each area are the result of its history. Latin America also has diversity in its races. Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans were the largest groups. Members of these groups intermarried and developed unique cultures over time.

In 1492, European countries sent explorers and armies to the Americas to create colonies and get rich from the resources of the new world. Over the next two hundred years, Spain and its neighbor Portugal were the two main countries to conquer and colonize Latin America. These two countries came to dominate Latin America so their languages and religions spread. Today, the majority of Latin America speaks Spanish because it was controlled by Spain. Brazil was controlled by Portugal, so the majority of Brazilians speak Portuguese. Spain and Portugal were both Roman Catholic countries, so the main religion throughout Latin America is Roman Catholic.

**The blending of Ethnic groups in Latin America**

The European countries of Spain and Portugal also had an effect on the racial and ethnic makeup of Latin Americans. Europeans wanted to make as much money as possible from the resources in Latin America. The main money makers in Latin America were sugar plantations and mines. Since both of these industries require many workers to maintain, Europeans decided that they needed slaves to work for them.

At first, Europeans tried to use Indigenous people as slaves, but they died quickly from European diseases and could run away and blend in with other Native Americans very easily. Europeans then decided that slaves from Africa would work better, since they already had immunities from European diseases and could not blend in as easily if they escaped.

Over the years, Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans intermarried and created a racially mixed society. Elements of all three cultures blended together to create unique cultures across Latin America.

**Economy of Latin America**

**SS6E1 The student will analyze different economic systems** c. Compare and contrast the basic types of economic systems found in Canada, Cuba, and Brazil.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Canada** | **Cuba** | **Brazil** |
| **Who owns businesses and Farms** | Private citizens and businesses | Mostly owned by the government. There is SOME private ownership of small farms and small businesses | Private Citizens and businesses for the most part; the government owns some larger industries, such as steel |
| **Who decides what to produce and how much to produce?** | Private citizens and businesses | Government planners | Private Citizens and businesses for the most part; the government owns some larger industries, such as steel |
| **Who decides how goods and services will be produced?** | Private citizens and businesses | Government planners | Private Citizens and businesses for the most part; the government owns some larger industries, such as steel |
| **Who decides how goods and services will be shipped?** | Private citizens and businesses | Government planners | Private Citizens and businesses for the most part; the government owns some larger industries, such as steel |
| **Who decides the prices for goods and services** | Buyers and sellers based on supply and demand | Government planners | Buyers and sellers based on supply and demand |
| **How are ownership rights protected** | Laws and a good court system protect people’s property rights | Some personal property rights are allowed, but the courts and judges are run by the central government (so if the government wanted to take a citizen’s property, they could) | Laws are in place, but a bad court system is a problem for protecting property rights |
| **How difficult is it to start your own business?** | Very easy, people can start a business in a few days. | Very little private business is allowed | Somewhat time-consuming, it would take several months to start a business. |

**Latin American History**

**SS6H1 The Student will describe the impact of European contact on Latin America** b. Explain the impact of the Columbian Exchange on Latin America and Europe in terms of the decline of the indigenous population, agricultural change, and the introduction of the horse

**The Colombian Exchange**

Christopher Columbus was the first European to explore the New World (the Americas) in 1492. Because Europeans came to the New World, an exchange of animals, plants, and diseases began between the Old World and the New World. One important part of the Colombian Exchange was the exchange of food plants. Cocoa, corn, potatoes, peppers, and tomatoes grew in Central and South America. The Spanish and Portuguese discovered these foods and took them back to Europe. European crops brought from Europe and Africa to the New World included coffee, peaches, sugar, and wheat. Farming changed in the New world. Large plantations, including sugar cane plantations that used slave labor were started.

The indigenous population was defeated by diseases that were also part of the Colombian exchange. The Europeans brought many diseases with them that the native people had not seen before. Their bodies did not have immunity (natural resistance) to the diseases, and their healers did not know how to treat the diseases. Some of the diseases brought to the New World were influenza, measles, smallpox, and typhoid fever. Europeans introduced certain animals to the New World. These included pigs, cows, goats, and bees. The horse was a culture-changing animal. It allowed native people to travel further and faster than they ever could before. Horses helped native people with battles, hunting, farming, and trade.

**SS6H2 The student will explain the development of Latin America and the Caribbean from European colonies to independent nations**. a. Describe the influence of African slavery on the development of the Americas.

**Slavery**

Finding cheap labor was a goal of the Europeans in the Americas. The Spanish and Portuguese who moved to the Americas to get rich from plantations and mines realized that these industries require many workers. They decided that they could make the most money if they made slaves work for them. These colonists looked to native people as slaves, but they were not a good choice. Millions of indigenous people died from diseases brought by the Europeans. Many indigenous slaves were able to easily escape and blend in with the free indigenous population. Europeans then looked to Africa for labor.

Africans were brought to the Americas by ship. For many, the difficult journey ended in death by starvation and disease. Once they arrived in the New World, the Africans were forced to work on plantations and mines. An intricate system of triangular trade developed in which European countries made products (like guns, clothing and jewelry) to purchase African slaves and sell to colonists in America. The slaves were then sold to plantation owners in the Americas to be used to produce raw materials (like sugar cane, cotton, and tobacco). These raw materials were then sold back to Europe to be used to make products (like guns, clothing, and jewelry) in a continuous cycle. Today, decedents of African slaves are a part of the culture of Latin America.

**Latin American History**

**SS6H3 The student will analyze important 20th century issues in Latin America and the Caribbean.** a. Explain the impact of the Cuban Revolution.

b. Explain the impact and political outcomes of the Zapatista guerilla movement in Mexico

**Cuban Revolution**

Cuba is an island nation located ninety miles south of Florida. For most of the twentieth century, it had political problems. American businesses traded heavily with Cuba. American companies owned large amounts of land in the country. Most of Cuba’s sugar crop was told to America. In the late 1950s, a change in leadership took place there. Fidel Castro became dictator, creating the only communist country in the western hemisphere.

Castro began right away to organize a communist government. He declared that all property belonging to Americans now belonged to the government. All farms, factories, and businesses owned by Cubans also became government property. Cubans no longer had the right to protest against the government. Cuban newspapers, radio and television were shut down. The government became the only source for news. Churches were closed, and all church property was taken by the government.

Because of these events, the United States placed an embargo on Cuban goods. That meant that Cuba’s sugar cane crop could not be sold to the United States. The Soviet Union became friends with Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis almost started a nuclear war. In 1962, Cuba gave the Soviet Union permission to build a missile launch pad. Missiles launched from this site could reach US cities. U.S president John F. Kennedy demanded that the missiles be removed. A tense time followed. Finally, the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles, and the United States agreed not to invade Cuba.