

UNIT 4 LATIN AMERICA

Chapter 12

The Geography and History of Latin America

CHAPTER PREVIEW

People

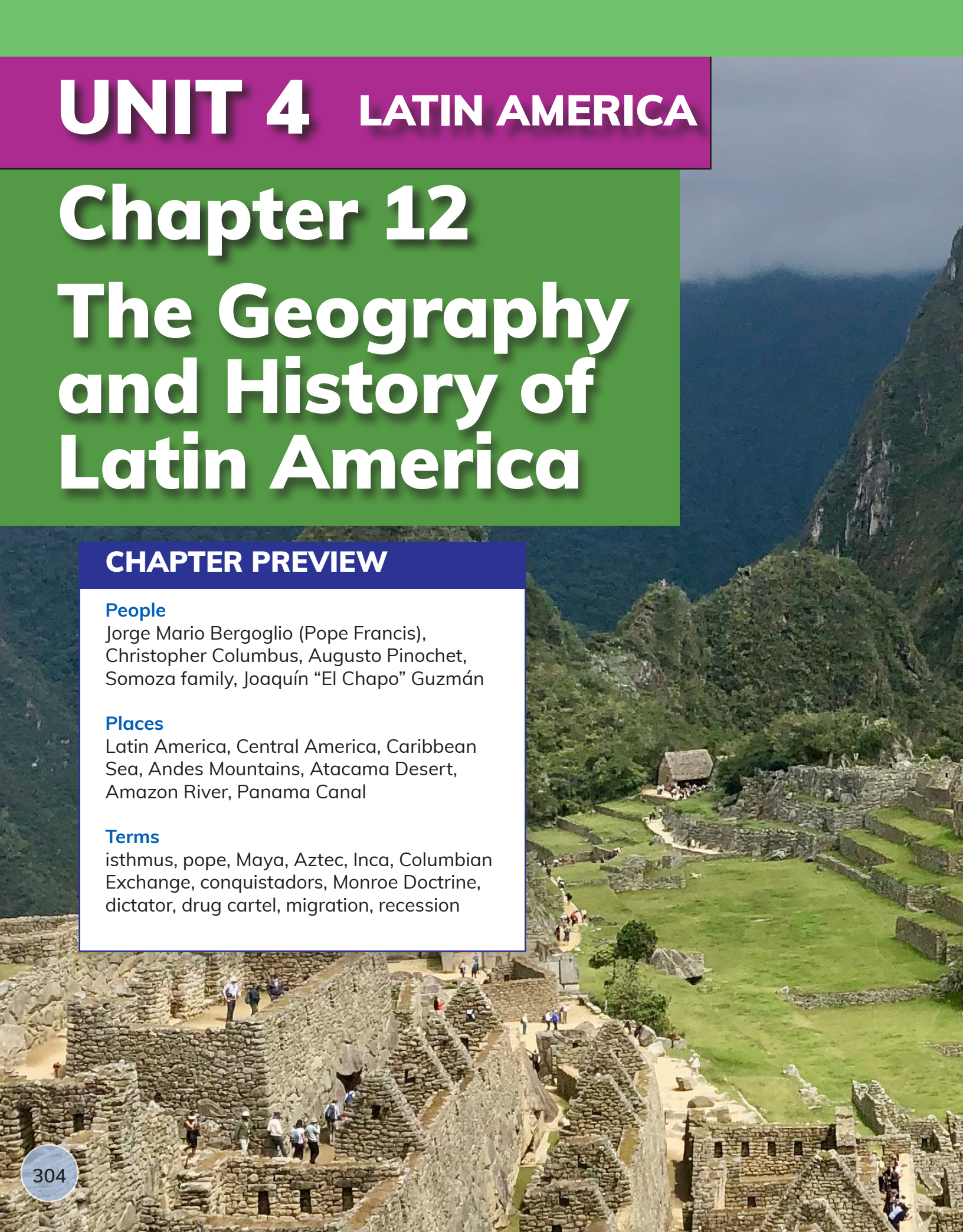
Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis), Christopher Columbus, Augusto Pinochet, Somoza family, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán

Places

Latin America, Central America, Caribbean Sea, Andes Mountains, Atacama Desert, Amazon River, Panama Canal

Terms

isthmus, pope, Maya, Aztec, Inca, Columbian Exchange, conquistadors, Monroe Doctrine, dictator, drug cartel, migration, recession



If you look at a globe, you are not likely to find a region called Latin America. There is the continent of South America. Central America might be labeled at the southern tip of the North American continent. Where on the globe is Latin America? To answer this question, you will need a lesson in languages.

The language of the ancient Roman Empire thousands of years ago was Latin. Modern languages that grew out of Latin are called Romance languages. They include Spanish, Portuguese, and French. In most countries in Central and South America, as well as island countries of the Caribbean Sea, one of these languages is spoken today. This is the result of colonization of these lands by Spain, Portugal, and France. The Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French-speaking countries are known as Latin American countries. Some people, however, label all countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean as part of Latin America.

English and Dutch are German-based languages, so countries such as Guyana (English-speaking) and Suriname (Dutch-speaking) are not included by some as Latin American countries even though they are South American. There is more to all of these countries than language, however.

"I must try and break through the clichés about Latin America. Superpowers and other outsiders have fought over us for centuries in ways that have nothing to do with our problems. In reality we are all alone."

- *Gabriel García Márquez*,
Columbian novelist



Background: Machu Picchu is a 15th-century Incan citadel in Peru.

Chapter 12: The Geography and History of Latin America

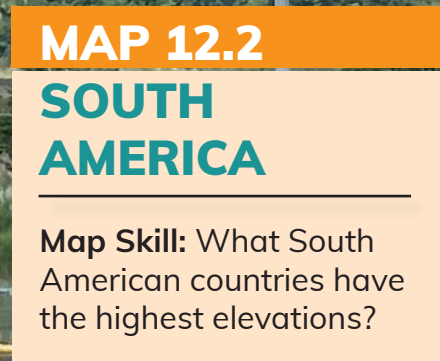


Figure 12.1

Timeline: Latin America

1900

- 1910 Mexican Revolution began
- 1914 Panama Canal opened to ship traffic
- 1937 Somoza family came into power in Nicaragua
- 1953 Cuban Revolution began, led by Fidel Castro
- 1974 Augusto Pinochet became president of Chile
- 1980 Last Somoza family leader assassinated
- 1985 Brazil returned to democratic rule after 21 years of military dictatorship

2000

- 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
- 2008 Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas launched
- 2013 Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina became Pope Francis
- 2014 Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán arrested
- 2015 Pope Francis helped the United States and Cuba establish diplomatic relations
- 2016 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, hosted the Summer Olympics
- Panama Canal expansion completed
- 2017 Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán extradited to the United States
- 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic began
- United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)
- 2024 Mexico elected Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, its first female president

Background: The Panama Canal is a 51-mile waterway connecting the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean.

SECTION 1

The Land and People of Latin America

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- » natural and man-made features of Latin America;
- » location of key countries in Latin America;
- » major languages spoken in Latin America;
- » major religions practiced in Latin America;
- » terms: **isthmus**, **pope**.

Did You Know?

The least-populous of the Latin American territories is the island of St. Barts, claimed by France, with a population of about 10,000. The least-populous independent country in Latin America is Uruguay, with about 3.3 million people.

Location and Features of Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America is located on two continents: North America and South America. The region is located in the western hemisphere and spans both the northern and southern hemispheres. The Atlantic Ocean is on the eastern side, and the Pacific Ocean is on the west.

It is good to know some of the main features of the land and water in more detail. Examine the map in this chapter and locate the United States. Then look southward to Mexico and notice a large area of mountains. This is the Sierra Madre range, which is the chief mountain range of Mexico. There is a large body of water on the western side of Mexico—the Pacific Ocean—which stretches down the entire western side of Central and South America. On the eastern side of Mexico, there are two smaller bodies of water—the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. The Gulf of Mexico is north of the Caribbean Sea. It touches both the United States and Mexico. It is here that warm waters flow in a river-like current to form the North Atlantic Gulf Stream. These warm waters cross the Atlantic and help to moderate the temperatures in countries of Northern Europe such as Great Britain and Germany. Farther south is the Caribbean Sea. It is bounded on the west and south by Mexico and Central America, on the south by South America, and on the north and east by many islands.





Moving south from Mexico on the map, you will find many smaller countries in Central America. This region is an **isthmus**, or narrow strip of land connecting two landmasses. Move further south into South America to find three main physical features: the Andes Mountains, the Atacama Desert, and the Amazon River. The Andes Mountains run the length of the western side of South America. The world's second-longest river, the Amazon, runs nearly across the widest part of South America, from the Andes Mountains eastward to the Atlantic Ocean. Further south, along the Pacific side of South America, the Andes Mountains block wind and rain, creating the second-driest place on earth, the Atacama Desert.

Locating Countries of Latin America

The United Nations recognizes 33 countries and 15 territories in Latin America and the Caribbean. Use the map to locate a few of them. Notice that Mexico has a long border with the United States. The country plays an important role in the economy of the United States. At the southern end of Central America is the Isthmus of Panama, home to the country of Panama and the Panama Canal. The canal serves as a shortcut for ships traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

At the northern tip of South America is Colombia, a country that is crossed by the Equator. To the east is oil-rich Venezuela, and south of Venezuela is Brazil, the largest country in South America. It is known for the Amazon River and the Amazon Rain Forest. Look west and south to find the long, thin country of Chile. This country is over 2,600 miles from north to south, making it one of the longest north-south countries in the world, yet it is only about 200 miles wide from west to east.

In addition to these countries, there are many island nations. An important one is Cuba. To find Cuba, locate Florida in the southeastern United States. South of Florida is a long island stretching to the southeast. This is Cuba. It is bounded on the northwest by the Gulf of Mexico, on the northeast by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the south by the Caribbean Sea. At its closest point, Cuba is only about 90 miles from the United States.

Did You Know?

In the center of the Atacama Desert in Chile, there are places where not even one drop of rain has ever been recorded.

Opposite Page:

Cayo de Agua, Los Roques Archipelago, Venezuela. **Above:** Volcáns de Agua, Fuego, and Acatenango in Guatemala. **Below:** Varadero resort area in Cuba.



Special Feature

The Panama Canal

Have you ever wondered why the Panama Canal was built? The Spanish were the first to imagine a canal that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during the 16th century. They envisioned a canal either in Panama or Nicaragua. In the mid-1800s, the United States built a railroad across Panama, which gave people the idea that the canal should be in Panama. In fact, the Panama Canal follows most of the route used by the railroad.

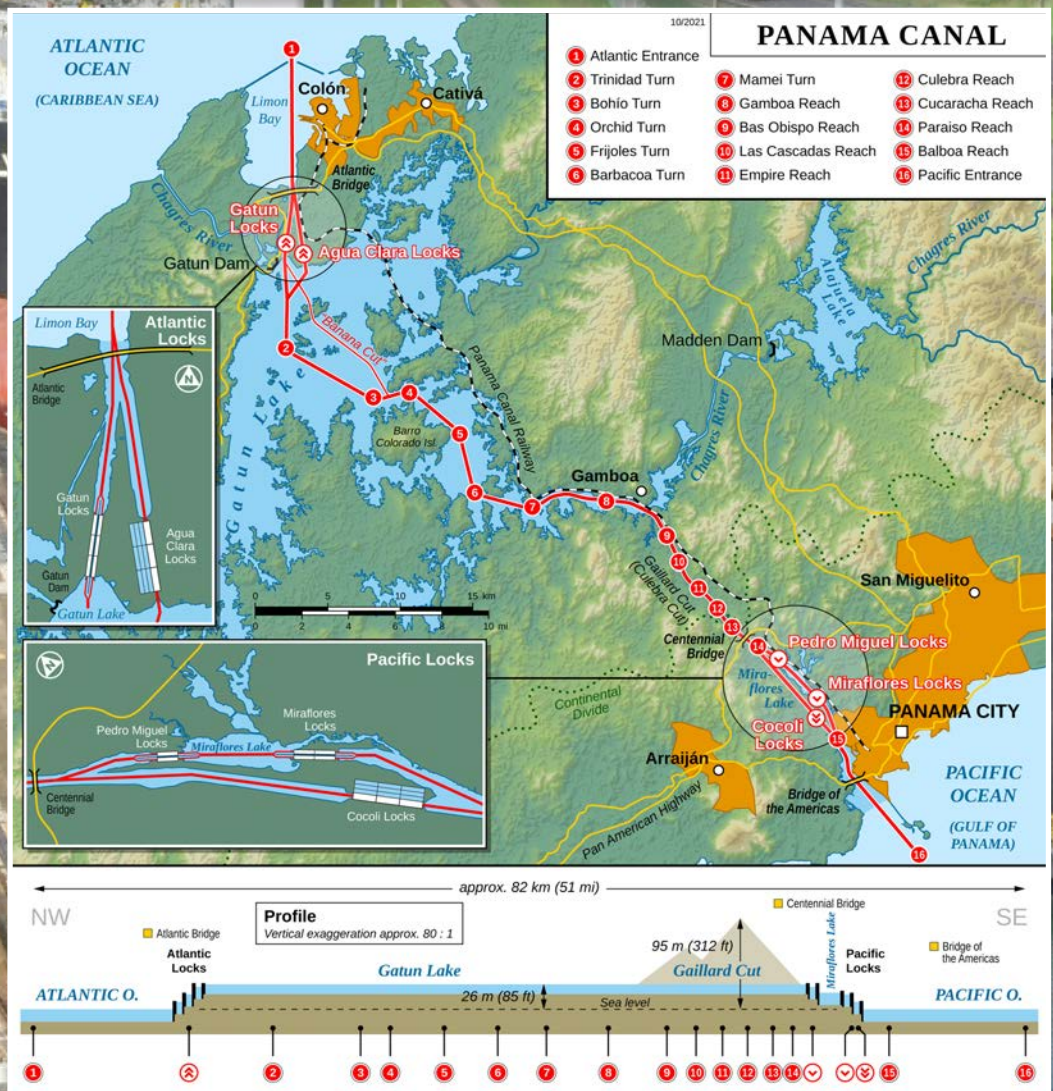
The first person to attempt to build the canal was a man named Ferdinand de Lesseps, who was funded by a French company. Work on the canal began in 1881. The company had high hopes for de Lesseps because he had just finished building the Suez Canal in Egypt that connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Unfortunately, de Lesseps was not prepared for how different Panama would be from Egypt. The weather was hot and humid, and the terrain was very different. Additionally, tropical disease claimed the lives of over 20,000 workers. By 1889, very little progress had been made, and the company that was funding de Lesseps failed. The canal remained unfinished until 1914.



Background: A large cargo ship moves through the locks of the Panama Canal.

In 1902, the United States Congress passed the Spooner Act that authorized the government to buy the rights to build the Panama Canal. However, negotiations with the Colombian government that controlled Panama were not successful. As a result, in 1903, Panama declared its independence from Colombia, and the United States recognized it as an independent country. Construction on the canal began in 1904, and less than half of the first French canal was even used! The construction workers learned from the mistakes of de Lesseps and were better prepared with more effective medicine to combat the tropical diseases and better machinery. Even so, over 5,600 men died from tropical diseases. The canal finally opened on August 15, 1914, but there was little celebration because World War I was just beginning in Europe.

Today, the Panama Canal is one of the most important shipping routes in the world. The 48-mile-long canal uses a system of locks and compartments to move ships from one ocean to the other. The locks raise the ships from sea level to about 85 feet at Gatun Lake. Once at this height, the ships enter another series of locks, lowering the vessels to sea level. The trip lasts about nine hours from start to finish, but it saves the ship, passengers, and cargo a tremendous amount of time compared to sailing around South America. Between 13,000 and 14,000 ships use the canal annually. An expansion completed in 2016 allowed larger container ships to travel through the canal, so ship traffic is expected to continue growing.





Languages of Latin America

As the Spanish and Portuguese conquered the indigenous people, they spread their languages and religion across Central and South America and the Caribbean. Spanish is the most common language there today with over 300 million native speakers, although there are many accents and varieties of Spanish depending on location. Spanish is the official language of 18 countries in the region. Portugal ruled Brazil from the 1500s until 1822, so Portuguese is the official language of Brazil. Because Brazil is such a large country in area and population, Portuguese is spoken by over 200 million Latin American people.

The written languages of Spanish and Portuguese use the same basic alphabet as English—the Roman, or Latin, alphabet. However, there are some additions that allow all the sounds of the language to be written. In Portuguese and French, for instance, the cedilla is needed. It is written like this: ç. The wavy tilde is added for some sounds such as the Spanish ñ and Portuguese ã and õ.

Smaller numbers of people speak other languages in the region. Dutch, French, and English are official languages of some smaller countries and territories. Some of the indigenous people of Central and South America moved into the mountains and into the jungles. This isolated them from the European explorers and colonists, so their languages survive today. Quechua, language of the Incas, is an example. It is spoken by nearly 10 million people in western South America. Guarani and Aymara are other native languages spoken by nearly 8 million South Americans. African languages have survived in some places. Haitian Creole, for instance, is a blend of French and African languages. Still, for the millions of people living in Latin America in the 21st century, Spanish and Portuguese are the most important languages for business, government, and culture.

In Other Words

A Portuguese-speaker is known as a lusophone; a French-speaking person is a francophone.

Top: The Spanish flag with the phrase “Do you speak Spanish?” **Right:** Sign in Japanese, Portuguese, and English in Oizumi, Japan, which has a large lusophone community due to the return immigration of Japanese Brazilians **Opposite Page, Top:** La Iglesia y Ex Convento de San Juan Bautista in Coyoacán in Mexico City. **Opposite Page, Bottom:** Pope Francis with Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, holding a mate, the traditional caffeine-rich Argentine drink.



Religion of Latin America

The religion of Latin America is mostly Roman Catholic. In the Roman Catholic Church, all believers are considered to be united under the leadership and ministry of the **pope**, who is the Bishop of Rome (Italy). During the colonial period, the governments of Spain, Portugal, and France, whose official religion was Roman Catholic, were rivals in politics but were supposed to have a common allegiance to the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. These countries paid for missionaries to go to the New World. They also paid for the construction of missions and churches.

Priests, friars, and monks of the Roman Catholic Church set up missions all over Latin America to convert the indigenous people to Christianity. They also ministered to the Europeans who moved to the area. The governments at times supported the church with protection by the army. Indigenous people were often forced to say they were accepting Christianity. However, they often continued to practice their traditional beliefs. Some people mixed their traditional beliefs with beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church.

As a result of these influences, it is estimated that over 425 million people, or 40 percent of the Roman Catholic Church population, is Latin American. In 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina became the first pope from Latin America. He took the name Francis. Pope Francis emphasized the need to help the poor, and he helped to bring together leaders in Cuba and the United States to restore diplomatic relations in 2015. Pope Francis died in 2025.



REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. On which continents is Latin America located?
2. Which two languages are primarily spoken by people in Latin America?
3. Which religion is dominant in Latin America?
4. What connection does Pope Francis have to Latin America?

SECTION 2

From Colonies to Independence

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- » people who lived in Latin America before the arrival of Europeans;
- » changes brought to the Old World and the New World by the Columbian Exchange;
- » the role of enslaved Africans in providing labor for the European colonies in Latin America;
- » independence movements across the Americas in the 18th and 19th centuries;
- » terms: **Maya, Aztec, Inca, Columbian Exchange, conquistadors, Monroe Doctrine.**



MAP 12.3 YUCATÁN PENINSULA

Map Skill: After reading the text, what do you think the red symbols on the map represent?

Indigenous People

Central and South America had amazing ancient cultures. These native cultures built empires that managed farms to feed their people, traded goods with nearby people, and developed complex social organizations. Throughout Latin America today, there is evidence of these now-vanished civilizations.

The **Maya** civilization developed in Central America on the Yucatán Peninsula. It seems to have reached its peak around 2,000 years ago. Its cities had temples, roads, ball fields, and pyramids. The Maya were known to trade in corn, beans, and squash, which were common crops in all of the Americas. They were also known to trade in chocolate!

Among the most famous of the indigenous people of Central and South America were the Aztec and the Inca. More is known about these people because their civilizations

were thriving when the European explorers began to arrive following Christopher Columbus's voyages.

The **Aztec** Empire was centered in what is now Mexico. Its capital city, Tenochtitlán, was built on islands in a lake where Mexico City is today. A large pyramid and island gardens made the city an impressive place.

Further south along the western coast of South America, the **Inca** Empire developed in the Andes Mountains. The empire's leader, known as the Sapa Inca, used a network of over 14,000 miles of roads through the mountains. A messenger system of runners delivered communication throughout the Inca Empire.

Figure 12.2

The Columbian Exchange



The Columbian Exchange

The rhyme that goes “In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue” is well known to American schoolchildren. It summarizes the time when European explorer Christopher Columbus made contact with the people of the Americas. This event started an exchange between the Old World (Europe) and the New World (the Americas). This **Columbian Exchange** included goods, people, ideas, plants, animals, and diseases.

One of the goals of the Europeans was to increase the wealth of their home countries. Crops were brought from the Old World to the New World including the grains barley, wheat, and rye. Sugar, bananas, and citrus fruits such as oranges were introduced as well. Wheat grown in Mexico and Argentina and sugar grown in the Caribbean and Brazil became important to the region’s economy. Cattle, goats, and sheep became important in the grasslands of Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina.

As the Spanish and Portuguese spread their empires, the indigenous populations began to decline. Disease was a big part of this decline—killing an estimated 50 to 75 percent of the population. The indigenous people did not have a natural immunity to diseases such as smallpox, measles, and malaria. These diseases, among others, ravaged their populations. War with the Europeans was another cause for the decline.

In order to meet the demand for goods to be sent back to Europe, the Europeans transported Africans to the New World as enslaved servants to work in mines and on plantations and to do other jobs against their will. The Africans became part of this trans-Atlantic exchange, too.

Did You Know?

The language of the Inca, Quechua, is spoken today by nearly half of Peru’s people.

Special Feature

The Pope's Line of Demarcation

You have learned how the European powers of Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands competed to gain territory across the world and in newly discovered lands. Have you ever wondered why there was never a major war fought over all the land discovered by Christopher Columbus? That was because Pope Alexander VI issued a bull, or official decree, to solve the issue.



After Columbus returned to Spain with stories of the New World, the monarchs of Spain—Isabella and Ferdinand—were anxious to gain control of this new land. They asked Pope Alexander VI to issue a papal bull that would give them claim to all the new land. As head of the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th century, Pope Alexander VI was always involved in international relationships across Europe. Because he was born in Spain, the Pope wanted what was best for Spain and agreed to issue the bull. On May 4, 1493, a papal bull of demarcation was issued that divided the new lands between Spain and Portugal. According to the bull, an imaginary line was drawn from the North Pole to the South Pole 100 leagues, or about 320 miles, west of the Cape Verde Islands. Everything to the west of this imaginary line would be

controlled by Spain, and everything to the east of the line would be Portugal's land. Remember, at this point in history, no one knew how much land was in the New World.

It is not surprising that this papal bull was unpopular with Portugal, as well as with other European nations that were completely left out. In fact, this line of demarcation even prevented Portugal from continuing its explorations of Africa. On June 4, 1494, ambassadors from Portugal and Spain met in the city of Tordesillas, Spain. At this meeting, the ambassadors agreed to move the line of demarcation to 370 leagues, or 1,185 miles, west of the Cape Verde Islands. This agreement is known as the Treaty of Tordesillas. Because of this agreement, Portugal was able to gain control of the eastern section of Brazil once it was discovered by Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500. This is why Portuguese is spoken in Brazil today! Why do you think the European countries wanted to avoid conflict over newly discovered lands?

Background: Treaty of Tordesillas.

Inset: A detail of The Resurrection fresco in the Borgia Apartments in Vatican City shows Pope Alexander VI in prayer.



MAP 12.4

SLAVE TRADE

Map Skill: About what part of the people forced from Africa into slavery were sent to Central and South America?

African Slavery

Gold and silver found by **conquistadors** (conquerors) made Spain and Portugal wealthy. The wealth also made the countries powerful. At first, these metals could be taken from the native people. As those supplies were used up, the Europeans decided to set up mines to find more. As more Europeans came to the Americas, some looked for ways to grow crops that could be sold in Europe. Sugarcane grew well in the Caribbean and in the tropics of Central and South America. Sugarcane was used to make sugar, molasses, and rum.

Both of these projects required a large and inexpensive labor force. The Europeans looked to Africa to increase the number of laborers. Africans were brought to the Americas by ship. The situation developed into the transatlantic slave trade, a massive, forced migration of African people eastward by ship across the Atlantic Ocean. Those who survived the journey had a hard life in the New World, with long hours of work, poor housing, and poor nutrition. Children born to the Africans were considered slaves, too. Children born to enslaved people were also considered slaves, facing a lifetime of work with no opportunity for freedom. For about three hundred years, businesses that depended on enslaved labor grew. The number of enslaved people increased, and the plantations cultivating cash crops expanded. The most profitable plantations were in tropical areas near the coast, where large farms could be established.

This labor force helped to build many of the countries of Latin America, but most of the wealth was sent back to Europe. As different countries gained freedom from Europe in the 1800s, they ended slavery. Today, the descendants of formerly enslaved people are an essential part of Latin America's culture. Most of the descendants still live in areas where plantation farming was important. Intermarriage of people from different continents has produced a diverse culture. People with only African ancestors or people with both African and European ancestors (mulattoes) live in large numbers in these countries. For instance, about 60 percent of Cubans and nearly 50 percent of Brazilians are in these groups.

Right: This mural, which depicts the idea of the Monroe Doctrine, is painted on the ceiling in a corridor of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, DC. **Below:** James Monroe was the 5th U.S. president and the last president who had been one of the Founding Fathers.



Independence Movements

The American Revolution in 1776 was an example of people in colonies fighting for independence from their home country. The French Revolution, which began in 1789, ended the absolute monarchy of the French royal family. These events nurtured ideas of freedom in the colonies of Latin America.

Mexico's move toward independence from Spain began in 1810, but the rebels failed. Smaller rebellions failed, too, until Mexico finally gained independence in 1821. Freedom of religion and equality of all people were important parts of the Mexican independence movement. Countries further south began to gain independence, too. Brazil became independent from Portugal in 1822. Nearly all of South America was free of Spanish rule by 1825.

Through the remainder of the 19th century, the United States had a dominant role in many Latin American countries. President James Monroe declared in 1823 that the United States would not tolerate European nations colonizing in Latin America. This idea, later called the **Monroe Doctrine**, became an important part of the policy of the U.S. government. The idea was that the rivalries and wars of countries in the Old World should not affect the freedom and independence of countries in the New World. The Monroe Doctrine also led the United States to try to have greater influence over the other countries in the western hemisphere.



REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. What were the three indigenous civilizations in Latin America before contact with Europe?
2. What two European countries had the most impact on the New World?
3. What were some effects of the Columbian Exchange on the New World?
4. How did African slavery get started in the New World and how was it ended?

SECTION 3

Modern Latin America

 AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- » the impact on political and social life resulting from the rule of dictators;
- » the war on drugs in Latin America and its impact on the United States;
- » the impact of poverty on the people of Latin America;
- » migration patterns across the Americas;
- » terms: **dictator**, **drug cartel**, **migration**, **recession**.



Dictators and Democracy

Governments in Latin America have often had times of instability since they gained independence. Many have been ruled by military leaders or **dictators** (people who rule with total authority, often in a harsh way). During the Cold War, the United States feared the influence of the Soviet Union in the western hemisphere. This resulted in the United States supporting leaders who were not always democratically chosen in fair elections. Democratic systems have spread, however, in the past few decades. The United States and Europe have provided models of stable government that have been used to design more democratic governments in Latin America.

One example of a Latin American dictator was Augusto Pinochet of Chile. This general ruled Chile for 17 years. Many believed Pinochet was able to keep communists from taking over the country, but others viewed him as a cruel leader who disrespected the rights of anyone who opposed him. Another example is the Somoza family of Nicaragua. This dictatorial family was in power for over 40 years. During their rule, the family grew wealthy while most of the country was in poverty. Even when elections were allowed, the family remained in power until the last leader was assassinated in 1980.

Even though elections are held in most Latin American countries today, there is widespread poverty, and liberal and socialist leaders dominate politics. Many of the leaders oppose the United States and win support from voters by blaming U.S. policies for problems in their country.



Top: Simón Bolívar led the countries of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia to independence from the Spanish Empire. **Above:** Augusto Pinochet was the dictator of Chile from 1973 to 1990.



The War on Drugs

The war on drugs has been an ongoing battle in the United States and many Latin American countries. Drugs such as marijuana and heroin have been illegally brought to the United States, although markets have grown to include routes around the world.

Mexico is working to restructure its police force and fund more opposition to **drug cartels** (criminal drug-trafficking organizations). Recent budgets are spending over \$15 billion for public and national security, including programs for crime prevention and justice reforms. Over the last few years, the police force has more than doubled in size and has begun encouraging citizens to be involved in crime control. Mexican states are also revamping their police forces and establishing internal affairs to control corruption.

Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, one of the country’s most powerful drug traffickers, was arrested in 2014. He escaped, but authorities arrested him again in 2016. A Mexican judge ruled that El Chapo could be extradited (sent for trial) to the United States. There, he was convicted of numerous crimes and was sentenced to life in prison. In 2025, U.S. authorities arrested two of El Chapo’s sons on drug-trafficking charges.

Top: USS Rentz (FFG-46) attempts to put out a fire set by drug smugglers trying to escape and destroy evidence. **Bottom:** The arrest of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán.

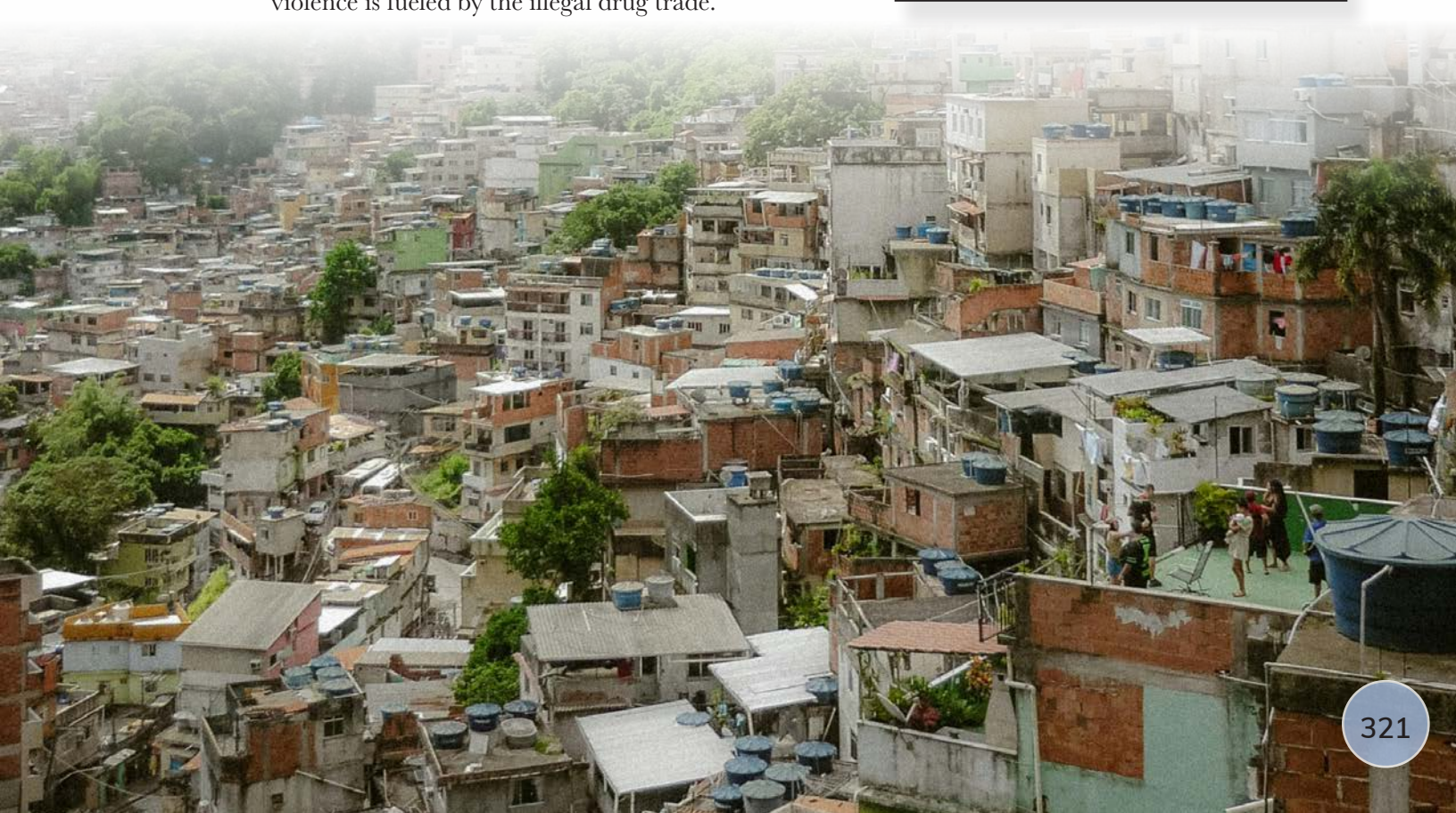


Cuba has implemented nationwide programs to keep drugs from being a major problem on the small island nation. A thorough prevention and information program with active policing has kept the drug problem to a minimum. Resources are set aside to prevent drug use from spreading, and drug traffickers usually avoid Cuba because of its strict sentencing laws. The tight control the government has on its people makes controlling drug trafficking somewhat easier in Cuba than in societies where citizens have more freedom.

Although Cuba does not have a major problem with drugs, the government has committed to work with the United States on any communication and information sharing. If any criminals from the United States try to find exile in the island country, Cuba is willing to assist in capturing them and returning them to U.S. authorities.

Unlike Cuba, where education and strict policing have deterred major drug problems, Brazil has large organizations that operate throughout the country. A major source of drugs such as cocaine, Brazil is a contributor to the European drug market through western African routes. Many large, sometimes violent, cartels control the drugs from within Brazil, but also from bordering countries—Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. These cartels use land routes as well as water routes along the Amazon River. The government of Brazil is aware the problem is a serious one. Officials are committed to taking on this problem but lack the resources to slow down the drug flow along the country's many borders and waterways. Brazil enjoyed the prestige of hosting the world for the Summer Olympics in 2016, but many in the host city of Rio de Janeiro live in poor, gang-infested areas where violence is fueled by the illegal drug trade.

Below: Luis Hernando Gomez-Bustamante, also known as “Rasguño” is arrested by the National Police of Colombia. **Bottom:** A favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Right: Outdoor kitchen. **Bottom:** Makeshift camp along a walking path. **Opposite Page:** Venezuelan family trying to migrate to the United States.



Poverty

With a turbulent history of inequality between European and indigenous peoples, the Latin American people have suffered financially. For hundreds of years, the indigenous and multicultural people have struggled to keep up with the success of European descendants and their families. Non-Europeans in most Latin American countries have always struggled with lower pay and inadequate housing, education, and health care.

The foremost problem seems to be that people who are born in a lower class tend to stay in that social structure with no chance of change. Many areas are so challenged they lack the basics of life: clean water, basic supplies, housing, electricity, and basic health care. People's self-esteem and confidence also must be taken into consideration. If their family has always been poor and is used to that way of life, it is sometimes difficult for them to adapt to a life out of poverty.

Jobs are mostly found in urban areas, away from the poor farming regions, but the same poverty-level problems persist in cities as well as rural areas. Low wages and labor-intensive jobs mean that few people can earn incomes high enough to provide for their families.





Migration

Immigrating to another country for a better life is not a new practice. However, new immigration laws and changing economies have changed **migration** (movement from one locality to another). In years past, people typically moved to the United States from Mexico and other Central American countries. There were more opportunities to find a job and support a family in the U.S. than in their home country.

When the economy of the United States experienced a **recession** or decline in its economy in 2008, the number of Central American migrants slowed. Instead, the Central American migrants spread throughout Mexico, settling in primarily rural regions and away from urban areas like Mexico City. The Mexican government was also trying to lure businesses to the regions by offering business incentives and keeping more of its citizens—and those of surrounding countries—employed and close to home.

Migration from the countries in Latin and Central America to the U.S. is long and difficult. Dangerous and rugged terrain must be crossed with deserts, mountains, and rivers. There is a risk of violence along the journey from the drug cartels. Criminals prey on the migrants as they travel north.

In South America, the regional movement has been affected by changes in leadership in countries such as Venezuela, where emigration increased when the economy was poor. People usually migrate to more stable areas with better jobs and living conditions. Technological advances and improved road systems have encouraged migration from once-remote areas.

REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. Why did the United States sometimes offer support to dictators in Latin America?
2. Which two Latin American countries seem to have the largest drug trafficking problem?
3. What measures does Cuba take to deter drug offenders?
4. What challenges do the poor in Latin America face on a daily basis?
5. What causes people in Latin America to migrate to the United States?

Chapter Review

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Section 1: The Land and People of Latin America

- Latin America is spread across North and South America, comprising many countries and various geographies.
- Due to the history of the area's colonization, the dominant languages of Latin America are Spanish and Portuguese and the dominant religion is Roman Catholicism.

Section 2: From Colonies to Independence

- Latin America was once home to the Maya, Aztec, and Inca Empires, whose complex architecture and extensive knowledge created some of the most impressive civilizations ever found.
- The Columbian Exchange was the exchange of goods, ideas, and even diseases between the indigenous people of Latin America and the Europeans.
- Europeans brought enslaved Africans to Latin America as a source of cheap labor to work in mines and on plantations.
- Many of the colonies gained independence in the 19th century.

Section 3: Modern Latin America

- Latin America has had problems supporting democracy. Many countries were often ruled by dictators, who were sometimes supported by the American government.
- Today, the area has problems with drug cartels, which ship drugs to the United States and other places around the world.
- Many people, especially indigenous people, live in poverty and have little or no chance of advancement.
- People from Latin America have migrated to the United States to find better jobs and avoid violence, but if their countries improve, they tend to stay.

Below: One of many Carnival parades held annually in Brazil.



ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING

Reviewing People, Places, and Things

Create a crossword puzzle with the following words.
Create clues for each of the words.

cartel
conquistadors
isthmus
Spanish
Aztec
migration
pope

Understanding the Facts

1. Who were the conquistadors?
2. What do most Latin American countries have in common?
3. Name five things spread by the Columbian Exchange.
4. What was the Monroe Doctrine?
5. Why do many Latin American countries blame the United States for problems in their countries?
6. Who is Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán?
7. How has Cuba stopped drugs from becoming a big problem in their country?
8. Why do indigenous peoples have a hard time making a better life for themselves?

Developing Critical Thinking

1. During the Cold War, the United States influenced elections of Latin American countries and established dictators who supported American goals. How do you think this has affected how people in Latin America view the United States? Can you think of any examples of this happening today?
2. In Latin America, the descendants of enslaved Africans make up a large percentage of the population. How do you think they and their ancestors influenced the culture of Latin America?

Writing across the Curriculum

Imagine you are an American journalist traveling around Latin America documenting migration to the United States. Write an article explaining why people migrate and how some countries have improved the standard of living, encouraging people to stay.

Applying Your Skills

Create a timeline with at least five historical events important for understanding Latin America today.

Exploring Technology

Visit the Latin America section of National Public Radio’s website: <https://www.npr.org/sections/latin-america/>. What is currently occurring in Latin America? Be sure to give details of one particular article or a trend you notice in multiple articles. Based on what you have just learned, are you surprised to read this? Why or why not?