**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 800 times the size of Cuba, and has a much larger population than Cuba.
* The Amazon Rainforest is most threatened by the cutting down of trees (known as clear-cutting and deforestation) and logging in the rainforest.
* Mexico City has an air pollution problem because of its geographical location lying in a bowl-shaped valley that is surrounded by the Sierra Madre Mountains. The large population is also a contributor.
* 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 make trade difficult for people in the region.
* Brazil’s language and culture have been greatly influenced by Portugal.
* Latin America and the Caribbean are very diverse and culturally-blended areas. One reason for this diversity is the intermarriage of European settlers, indigenous people, and Africans.
* Mulattoes are a blending of European and Africans.
* Mestizos are a blending of Europeans and Natives.
* Cultural diffusion is the spreading and sharing of different cultures and ideas.

**History**

* Spain has 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. Spanish is also a predominate language that is spoken in this region.
* In the 1500s, the Aztec civilization was conquered by conquistadors led by Hernán 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 1810, Miguel Hidalgo, the father of the independence movement in Mexico, inspired people to rise up against Spain to fight for their independence during “The Cry of Dolores.” Mexico, however, did not gain independence until 1821.
* Simon Bolivar, “the liberator”, led Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Panama, and Ecuador in their successful fight for independence against Spain.
* The Cuban Revolution was when Fidel Castro overthrew Fulgencio Batista in 1959 and set up a communist government.
* The United States placed an embargo on Cuba when Fidel Castro took over businesses owned by Americans on Cuban land.
* 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 NAFTA would cause poor Mexican farmers to go out of business, and it would increase poverty among the indigenous people rather than reduce it. The government has done very little to help improve life for Mexico’s indigenous people.

**Government**

* A federal system is where power is divided equally between the central and state governments.
* A confederation is a small group of countries that government and membership is voluntary.
* A unitary government is where the central government has all the power.
* An autocratic government would most likely abolish all opposing political parties, the direct election of leaders, and free speech. There is only one leader in an autocratic government.
* An oligarchy is a government that is ruled by a small group of people.
* In a democracy, citizens can best influence the government by voting because they have all the power.
* Brazil and Mexico have a federal system with a presidential democracy.
* Cuba has a unitary system with an autocracy/ oligarchy.

**Economy**

* A market economy is an economic system in which people 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.
* The North American Free Trade Agreement was designed to promote free trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. This means there are no tariffs or quotas.
* The purpose of NAFTA is to increase trade by doing away with tariffs and quotas.
* Tariffs are taxes 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 of specialization is a factory can efficiently produce high quality goods. Countries may also export their specialized goods/services for goods/services they need.
* 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.
* 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.