

# The Other Americans

## Rationale

In order to better understand Latin America and the Caribbean, its land and people must be appreciated in their own right. The social and cultural tapestry of the region is rich and diverse. This diversity is reflected in the language, ethnicity, and customs of its people, as well as in the geography of the region. Thus, it is important that students recognize that, although there are some generalizations about Latin America and the Caribbean that hold true, there are also many exceptions. In this lesson, students will explore some of the myths and realities that define Latin America today.

## Objectives

The students will:

1. Explain the concept of culture and identify the components of a culture.
2. Describe the characteristics of selected immigrant groups and the conditions they faced upon arrival in the United States.
3. Analyze the cultural, political, and geographical diversity found in Latin America.
4. Assess the validity of his/her initial impressions about Latin America.

## Key Concepts

Culture, ethnicity, pluralism, stereotypes.

## Infusion Area

World History, American History, Geography, World Cultures, Global Studies, Sociology.

## Materials Needed

"What Comes to Mind...? (overhead transparency)

"Overview of Latin America" (teacher resource)

"Lecture Worksheet" (student resource)

"Survey on Latin America" (student resource)

## Suggested Time

Two class periods.

## Learning Activities

### *Suggested Activities for Day 1:*

1. Using an overhead projector, present students with the "What picture comes to mind...? Transparency. Read questions to students and ask them to share their thoughts regarding each of the headings with the class. Note their observations on the transparency under the appropriate heading. Ask students to withhold any judgments or reactions until every item on the transparency has been completed.

Initiate a discussion using the following questions:

- a. How did we arrive at these impressions of Latin America? From where did we get our information?
- b. What might we infer about our view of Latin America from the evidence (impressions) generated?
- c. How many of you have visited, lived in, or come from Latin America?
- d. How accurate and/or valid are these observations about the region likely to be?

Keep the transparency; you will refer back to it during Day 2.

### *Suggested Activities for Day 2:*

1. Preview "overview of Latin America." Use this information as the basis for a brief lecture to the class. Distribute "Lecture worksheet" and ask students to complete their worksheets during your presentation. This might be a good time to introduce, emphasize, and/or reinforce any particular note-taking method that you might be using with the class. Review the concepts of culture and ethnicity with the class prior to or during the course lecture. You may want to include the following definitions in the review:

Slavin (1994) defines culture as: "the language, attitudes, ways of behaving, and other aspects of life that characterize a group of people" (p. 114).

Benett (1990) defines an ethnic group as: "a group of people within a larger society that is socially distinguished or set apart, by others and/or by itself, primarily on the basis of racial and/or cultural characteristics, such as religion, language, and tradition" (p. 39).

Point out to students that Latin America is an extremely complex region both in terms of culture and ethnicity.

2. After the lecture, ask students to use their notes to respond to the following questions:

- a. What did you learn from this presentation that really surprised you?
- b. Was there anything that you learned that was exactly the opposite of what you believed about the region?

Show students the overhead transparency completed yesterday and ask them to compare and contrast their initial observations about Latin America with the information on their lists. Introduce students the concept of stereotype.

Bennet (1990) defines stereotype as: "a mental category based on exaggerated and inaccurate generalizations used to describe all members of a group. Stereotypes are erroneous beliefs, either favorable or unfavorable, that are applied universally and without exception" (p. 17).

Conclude the lesson by discussing the following questions with the class:

- a. To what extent were your initial impressions about Latin America stereotypes erroneous?
- b. How might stereotype views of other regions of the world affect how we feel and behave towards immigrant groups in our community?

Both questions might also serve as good writing prompts for a journal activity.

### **Assessment**

Have students conduct a survey of people's impressions about Latin America within their school or communities using the "Survey on Latin America" sheet. Ask students to report their findings to the class.

Working in small groups, have students produce a newspaper, which reflects the experiences, lives and times of Latin American immigrants to the United States. Encourage students to focus on the cultural and ethnic diversity found in Latin America.

### **Additional Activities**

Have students select a Latin American country and conduct research about its culture. Using the information obtained, the students will develop a cultural profile of the country to get along with its people.

**What picture comes to mind when you hear the term "Latin America"?**

**LANGUAGE GEOGRAPHY**

**FOOD POPULATION**

**POLITICS RELIGION**

**FAMILY ETHNICITY**

**OTHER**

## **Overview of Latin America**

### **LANGUAGE**

The languages spoken in Latin America include Portuguese, Spanish (most prevalent), French, Dutch, English, Creole, and indigenous dialects. Some of the more important native American languages are as follows: Guarani, Quechua, Nahuatl, and Aymara. Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, and Slavic languages are also spoken in some areas of Central and South America (Athey).

## **GEOGRAPHY**

Latin America is usually broken down into four basic regions: Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America (Goodwin).

Latin America occupies the southern portion of the continent of North America and the entire continent of South America. Latin America extends 33 degrees north latitude to 56 degrees south latitude, the greatest latitudinal range of any world region. Consequently, it has a highly diverse climate and geography. Latin America is larger than the United States and Canada combined. The size of the nations of Latin America vary greatly-from Brazil, which is almost as large as the entire United States, to some of the islands in the Caribbean, which are smaller than New York City (Athey).

South America is actually a misnomer; it should more appropriately be called "Southeast America" because it lies to the south and is quite east of North America (DeBlij). This geographic phenomenon is apparent in the market influence that Europe and Africa have had on the region.

The Caribbean islands range from nearly flat landscapes to mountainous, volcanic terrains. Central America is mountainous, volcanic, earthquake-prone, lake-studded. Coast lands are swampy; interior lowlands are covered by dense and nearly impenetrable forests. South America's physiography is dominated by the Andean Mountains, "The Backbone of South America," on the West (a continuation of the Rocky Mountains of the U.S. and Canada) and the Amazon Basin in the North; the remainder is plateau (DeBlij). All four of the world's major landforms-mountains, hills, plateaus, and plains are found in Latin America (Athey).

## **FOOD**

The main meal in Latin America tends to be at midday (Axtell). This meal consists of several courses-the number and variety of which may depend on family income-while dinner, usually much smaller, is not served until 8 or 9 p.m.

Though certain foods (like corn, tomatoes, beans, rice, and chicken) are common to all countries, the food varies greatly from place to place (Athey).

## **POPULATION**

In South America, population densities are fairly low, but growth rates are among the world's highest (mostly distributed on peripheral zones). Half the area and population are in Brazil (DeBlij).

The population is overwhelmingly urban. There are more cities with population greater than 500,000 in Latin America than in the United States (Goodwin). About two-thirds of the population live in cities (Athey).

## **POLITICS**

The region has been marked by frequent changes in government; many of these changes have been supported by the army (Schwartz, et al.).

There is a history of authoritarian political culture, oriented toward power and power relationships (Goodwin). Caudillismo (tradition of autocratic rule generally-but not always-favoring the interests of the upper class) and personalism have marked political relations between people and government. In most of the area, the laws are based on ancient Roman Law or on the Napoleonic Code (Athey).

Despite the recent trend towards democratization, privatization, and free-market policies, many nations in the region continue to face political instability as a result of debt problems, rapid population growth, and the large gap between the rich and poor (Feeney, Kovalesky, and Barry).

## **RELIGION**

The overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of Latin Americans are Roman Catholic (Athey). Although there are Protestants-currently the fastest growing Christian religion in the region-Jews, Muslims, and Hindus in Latin America, they are small in number compared with Roman Catholics (Schwartz, et. al).

Especially in South America, the Catholic Church dominates life and is one of its unifying elements (DeBlij). The practice of religion today centers around traditional ceremonies relating to birth, marriage, and death (Athey).

"In the Caribbean and in Brazil, the African influence has led to the development of a variety of religious rituals that combine African and Catholic traditions. These rituals have various names: in Haiti, voodoo; in Cuba, santería; in Trinidad, sango; and in Brazil, candomble and macumba" (Athey).

## **FAMILY**

The family is considered by many scholars of Latin America to be the single most important social institution. Each member has a clearly defined role (Athey).

The concept of extended family can be described as a network of cousins, godparents, and close friends of blood relatives in addition to the nuclear family of father, mother, and children (Goodwin).

## **ETHNICITY**

The region is marked by pluralism and regionalism (DeBlij). The contributors to Latin American cultures are as follows: Spain, Portugal, England, France, the Netherlands, Africa, Asia, and the indigenous peoples. Culture is partly a mixture of historical circumstances (Goodwin).

Most of the Indians in Latin America live in Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Ecuador; there are about 30 million Indians in the region. It is estimated that more than 5 millions black Africans were brought to Latin America as slaves between the early 1500s and the late 1800s; about two-thirds of them went to Brazil (Athey). Mestizos are people who are part native American and part European. Mulattos are of mixed African and European backgrounds (Schwartz, et. al ). There is a multiplicity of cultures-very

complex in Latin America (Goodwin).

## References

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Axtell, R.E. (1985). *Do's and Taboos Around the World*. N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons.

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Feeney, R. Kovalesky, M.F.; and Barry, J.J. (1994). *Brief Review in Global Studies*. Engle-wood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

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Peiser, A.; and Serber, M. (1995). "Latin America." In *Our World: A Global Studies Text*. (pp. 136-193). New York: Amsco.

Slavin, R. E. (1994). *Educational Psychology: Theory and Practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Lecture Guide***

<b>Things I find especially interesting about Latin America</b>	<b>Things about Latin America I didn't know before</b>

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Survey on Latin America

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### *Subject Information*

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Approximate Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Subject Impressions*

"What is the first factor that comes to mind when you think of the following topic areas about Latin America?"

#### **Location:**

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#### **Geographic Features:**

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#### **Languages:**

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#### **Foods:**

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#### **Politics:**

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#### **Other:**

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