

Latin America: Revolution and Reaction into the 21st Century

Latin America After World War II

- Following World War II, authoritarian rulers held power in several Latin American countries, including Perón in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil. Dissent was often countered by oppressive measures.
- The PRI controlled Mexico until 2000. The **Zapatistas** emerged in 1994, calling to mind Emiliano Zapata's unfulfilled movement. Mexico joined the North American Free Trade Union (NAFTA), hoping to boost its economy through trade with the United States. The election of Vicente Fox, in 2000, leader of the National Action Party (PAN), ended decades of PRI domination.

Radical Options in the 1950s

- Unsatisfied desire for reform built up in many countries, including Venezuela and Costa Rica, where elections brought reformers to power. In 1952, a revolution broke out in Bolivia, but conservative forces won the day.
- Guatemala, like Bolivia, had an Indian majority and an extremely inequitable distribution of resources. **Juan José Arevalo** was elected in 1944. His program included land reform, in the face of such large foreign companies as the **United Fruit Company**. Arevalo was replaced in 1952 by Jacobo Arbenz. The United States moved to protect United Fruit from Arbenz's more radical program and to stop perceived communism. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency organized an invasion force, bringing in a pro-U.S. regime. Guatemala's problems continued, and a guerilla movement emerged.
- Unlike Guatemala and Bolivia, Cuba had a population mostly descended from European colonists and African slaves. By the 1950s, Cuba was firmly in the U.S. sphere of influence. **Fulgencio Batista** ruled Cuba from 1934–1944. Undertaking reforms, his regime moved close to dictatorship. In 1953, **Fidel Castro** launched an unsuccessful attack on the Cuban military. Fleeing to Mexico, Castro joined **Ernesto "Che" Guevara**, and the two raised troops and invaded Cuba in 1956. By 1958, they were in control, and Castro's movement had become more radical. U.S. opposition pushed Castro into the Soviet camp. The United States face-off with Cuba became part of the Cold War. Castro's reforms were sweeping, and particularly successful in the area of social welfare. The Cuban economy, on the other hand, required Soviet support. Reform in Cuba, and the island's resistance to U.S. pressure, made it an attractive model for other Latin American countries.

The Search for Reform and the Military Option

- In Latin America, revolution continued to be a likely option to resolve persistent problems. Another option, taken by Mexico, was the stability of one-party rule. Christian Democrats, especially in Chile and Venezuela, offered the support of the church in seeking social reform and protection of human rights. **Liberation theology**, combining Catholic theology and socialism or Marxism, was another popular solution.
- Military involvement in Latin American politics was a long-standing tradition. Often acting in reaction to the threat of reform, including communist programs, military groups took action in Brazil and Argentina. In Chile, the socialist President **Salvador Allende** was removed by the military. Military regimes aimed to impose neutral regimes that would stabilize their economies. Brutality was used when it was thought necessary. Economic growth was achieved in some cases, but at the cost of more equitable resource distribution. Military regimes varied, and in some cases sought popular support and social and land reforms.
- By the middle of the 1980s, military regimes were giving way to civil governments. Elections were held in Argentina in 1983. El Salvador and Guatemala were returned to civilian rule in 1992 and 1996. Inflation, debt, and the drug traffic plagued Latin American economies. While democracy spread, some countries took more radical paths. Hugo Chávez's regime in Venezuela gained a following in other countries.
- The United States cast a long shadow over Latin American developments throughout the 20th century. U.S. influence included private investment, outright invasion, and sometimes both. More than 30 U.S. military actions occurred in Latin America before 1933. Nicaragua's **Augusto Sandino** led armed resistance against U.S.-trained forces, inspiring the Sandinista movement. U.S. intervention led to the establishment and then control of so-called **banana republics**. Widespread hostility to U.S. interference was voiced by Pablo Neruda. Franklin D. Roosevelt's **Good Neighbor Policy** was a brief change to more equitable relations. The U.S. **Alliance for Progress** provided over \$10 billion to help economic development in Latin America. The 1970s and 1980s were typified by U.S. involvement in Latin America on an ad hoc basis to protect U.S. interests. Financial support from the United States to Latin America is largely for military spending.

Societies in Search of Change

- Important social changes occurred in Latin America in the 20th century, in spite of disappointments in attempts to bring about larger social reforms.
- Women's roles changed slowly. Ecuador, Brazil, and Cuba granted women the right to vote by 1932. Feminist and suffrage movements became more active. In some countries, women gained the vote, only to join parties that denied them further rights. Entering the workforce in large numbers in the early decades of the 20th century, women still lagged behind men in pay. Women in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia are influential in small-scale commerce and have become a political force. Concerning the position of women, by the mid-1990s, Latin America stood between industrialized and developing nations.

- Population growth was high in Latin America, and accompanied by significant population movements. Mexican migrant labor into the United States reached 750,000 per year by 1970, primarily coming from Mexico. The figure is about 5 million for movement within the continent. Industrialization, political repression, and instability have contributed to the phenomenon. Moreover, movement from rural to urban areas has created large urban areas surrounded by shantytowns. Unlike rural workers moving into towns during European industrialization, the new arrivals often failed to make it into the ranks of industrial workers. A divided urban population has resulted.
- Latin America remains overwhelmingly Catholic. Popular culture has maintained its energy. Striving for social justice and welfare has invigorated artistic expression. Frustrated desire for change led some writers to pursue “magical realism.” Writers such as Gabriel García Márquez combined close observation of his own culture with a fantastic setting.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. All of these were 20th-century Latin American revolutionary movements or revolutions EXCEPT:
 - (A) Liberation theology.
 - (B) Nicaraguan Revolution.
 - (C) Cuban Revolution.
 - (D) Mexican Revolution.
 - (E) Bolivian Revolution.
2. All of these are traditional Latin American populist political practices or ideas EXCEPT:
 - (A) anti-imperialism, especially against the United States and Europe.
 - (B) acceptance of communism.
 - (C) nationalism.
 - (D) nationalization of foreign assets.
 - (E) anti-establishment attitudes supported by urban workers and rural peasants.
3. In 20th-century Latin America, the military was typically
 - (A) small and usually ineffective.
 - (B) liberal and reform-minded.
 - (C) anti-Catholic and in favor of a secular society.
 - (D) democratic but involved in politics.
 - (E) socially conservative, elitist and authoritarian.
4. Argentina’s Perón and Brazil’s Vargas regimes were
 - (A) pro-European or Western.
 - (B) favorably inclined toward foreign investments in national industries.
 - (C) often simultaneously fascist, nationalistic, socialist, and populist.
 - (D) supportive of the communist.
 - (E) anti-union and anti-worker.
5. Throughout 20th-century Latin America, the people most often excluded from influence, or socially marginalized, were the
 - (A) intellectuals, especially writers and artists.
 - (B) clergy, especially Roman Catholic priests and nuns.
 - (C) indigenous peoples and descendants of African slaves.
 - (D) peasants and rural landowners.
 - (E) workers and miners.
6. The Latin American country and ruler who most directly challenged American regional hegemony during the Cold War was
 - (A) Mexico’s Cardenas.
 - (B) Chile’s Allende.
 - (C) Argentina’s Perón.
 - (D) Brazil’s Vargas.
 - (E) Cuba’s Castro.

-
7. All of these Latin American nations experienced military dictatorships and repression during the 20th century EXCEPT:
- (A) Chile.
 - (B) Argentina.
 - (C) Peru.
 - (D) Mexico.
 - (E) Venezuela.
8. Which statement about Latin America since the 1980s is a FACT?
- (A) Economic development came at the expense of enormous foreign debts.
 - (B) Democracy and democratic rule was threatened by military takeovers.
 - (C) Conservative groups and elite parties still dominate Latin America.
 - (D) The United States has abandoned its longtime role of intervention in the region.
 - (E) Latin America has been able to exterminate the drug trade.
9. The American policy most favored by the majority of Latin Americans in the 20th century has been
- (A) Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.
 - (B) Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.
 - (C) Jimmy Carter's return of the Panama Canal to Panama.
 - (D) Jimmy Carter's human rights campaign.
 - (E) the periodic occupation of many nations by U.S. troops.
10. All of these are demographic trends and problems in 20th-century Latin America EXCEPT:
- (A) rapid urbanization.
 - (B) migration of unskilled laborers, the poor, and the politically repressed to richer countries.
 - (C) millions of refugees due to wars and famines.
 - (D) excessively large population growth rates.
 - (E) staggering growth of capital cities.

Free-Response Question

Compare and contrast any two Latin American countries on the basis of their approach to social and economic problems in the late 20th century.

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (A) is correct.** Liberation theology is an ideology combining religious and political principles.
- **2. (B) is correct.** Communism gained some adherents, but was not widespread or traditional.
- **3. (E) is correct.** Latin American military leaders were generally drawn from elite groups and concerned with social upheaval.
- **4. (C) is correct.** The two regimes do not fit any one ideological mold.
- **5. (C) is correct.** Caste traditions continued throughout Latin America, marginalizing indigenous and black peoples.
- **6. (E) is correct.** Castro was by far the greatest challenge to U.S. influence, siding with the Soviet Union against the United States.
- **7. (E) is correct.** Venezuela alone avoided military dictatorship.
- **8. (C) is correct.** A dominant elite still monopolizes political power in Latin America, leaving a large part of the population with little or no political voice
- **9. (B) is correct.** The Good Neighbor Policy, treating Latin American countries

as equals, found great favor on the continent. The other policies named have had adherents, but not wide support.

- **10. (C) is correct.** Latin America in the 20th century has been free of the plagues of war and famine.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

Compare and contrast any two Latin American countries on the basis of their approach to social and economic problems in the late 20th century.

Cuba and Guatemala show two different approaches to the enduring social and economic problems of Latin America. Under Fidel Castro, Cuba introduced socialism, eventually with the support of the Soviet Union. His methods included expropriation of property, collectivization, and extensive welfare and education programs. Juan Perón, in Argentina, used an eclectic mix, based on popular support. Juan José Arevalo, in Guatemala, and his successor, Jacobo Arbenz, attacked the problem from the ground up, addressing workers' concerns. Arevalo also called on nationalist sentiment, and Arbenz targeted foreign corporations. It is interesting to compare the two in the context of the Cold War. The power of the United States figured large in both countries. In Cuba it was countered by an alliance with the Soviet Union, allowing the revolution to survive, while Guatemala's more moderate program was halted by U.S. involvement when the United Fruit Company was threatened.

