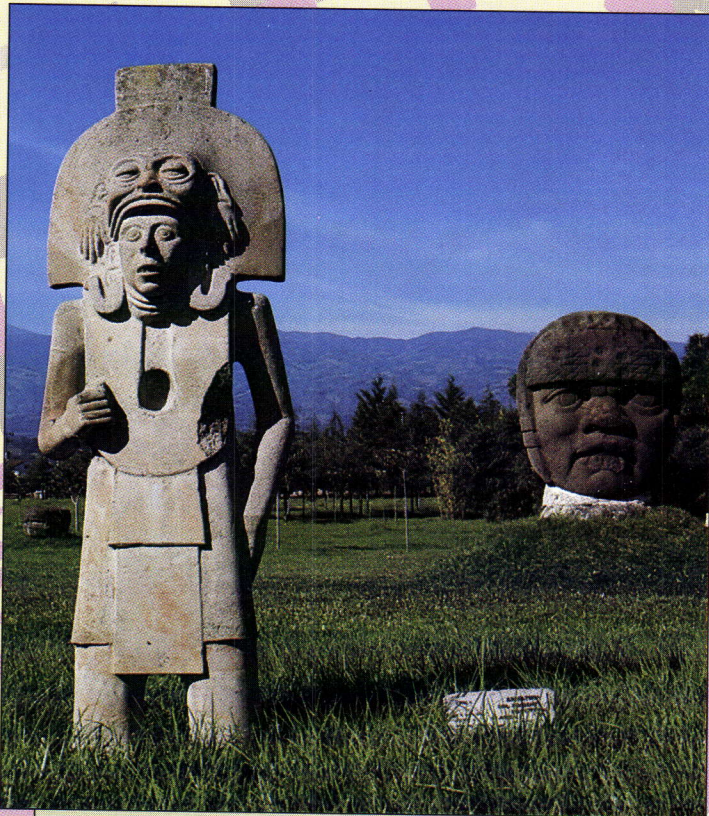


# GEOGRAPHY AND EARLY HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA



**Ancient Mexican Art** These stone carvings from early Mexican civilizations are in an outdoor park. The giant head was made by the Olmecs in about 900 B.C. The standing figure, from the Maya civilization, dates from A.D. 800. These ancient civilizations had a lasting influence on the diverse cultures of the Americas.

**Fine Art** Why do you think these artworks are on display in a public park?

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

- 1 The Shape of the Land
- 2 Climates and People
- 3 Early Civilizations

**T**housands of years ago, Native Americans paddled canoes from northern South America to the islands of the Caribbean Sea. They were a peaceful people who had been driven from their homes by warlike neighbors.

The islands of the Caribbean seemed a perfect place in which to settle. Trees loaded with fruit offered an abundant food supply. The coastal waters abounded with fish.

The newcomers gave thanks to their many gods—of the sun, the sea, the rain—who favored the islands with their riches. Soon, however, they learned about the god Hurakan. During late summer and early fall, Hurakan sent terrible storms to the islands. Howling winds, blinding rains, and 50-foot waves crashed over the beaches, wrecking everything in their path.

The fearful islanders prayed to this dreaded god of storms:

“ Oh dread wind of the sea,  
please stay away from  
our shores. ”



**Latin America and Canada**

**1700**

**1800**

**1900**

**2000**

▲ **1756–1763**

French and Indian War

▲ **1804–1828**

Most Latin American countries gain independence

▲ **1910**

Mexican Revolution begins

▲ **1990**

Nicaragua holds elections

▲ **1774**

Quebec Act guarantees French Canadians religious freedom

▲ **1800s–1900s**

Millions of Europeans immigrate to Latin America

▲ **1982**

Gabriel García Márquez wins Nobel Prize for literature

▲ **1700s**

Portuguese mine gold and diamonds in Brazil

▲ **1865**

Slave trade ends

▲ **1993**

United States, Mexico, and Canada sign free-trade agreement

Later, when Europeans reached the islands of the Caribbean, they, too, felt the fury of tropical storms. They called the storms hurricanes, after the islanders' fierce god Hurakan.

## CHAPTER PERSPECTIVE

Today, hurricanes still rip across the land bordering the Caribbean Sea. These storms are one of the many ways geography affects Latin America. Latin America is a vast cultural region that stretches from Mexico to the tip of South America. A variety of landforms and climates have helped to shape the cultures of this huge region.

As you read, look for these chapter themes:

- ▶ Latin America is a region of widely diverse physical features, climates, and cultures.
- ▶ Physical features and climate have influenced the patterns of settlement in the region.
- ▶ Latin American cultures are a mixture of Native American, African, and European traditions.
- ▶ Advanced civilizations, including those of the Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas, emerged in the Americas.

### Literature Connections

In this chapter, you will encounter passages from the following works.

Prayer to Hurakan, islanders of the Caribbean Sea

*The Incas*, Pedro Cieza de León

For other suggestions, see Connections With Literature, pages 804–808.

1

## THE SHAPE OF THE LAND

### FIND OUT

What regions and landforms does Latin America include?


How have geographic features contributed to regionalism?

What river systems are important to Latin America?

**Vocabulary** pampas, regionalism

**T**wo high peaks guard a rugged valley in the mountains of Mexico. From time to time, wisps of smoke rise from the one called Popocatépetl (poh poh kah TEH peht ' l), or Smoking Mountain. Snow blankets a companion mountain, Ixtacihuatl (eehs tah SEE waht ' l), or Sleeping Woman.

An Indian legend tells the origins of the two peaks. Long ago, a prince left his beloved wife and went off to war. After a time, word reached the princess that her husband had been killed in battle. Grief-stricken, she lay down, covered herself with a white robe, and died.

The prince, however, had not been slain in battle. When he returned to find his wife in the sleep of death, he knelt beside her and burned incense to her memory. The smoke rising from Popocatépetl reminds people today of this ancient tale. Throughout Latin America, legends such as this expressed people's feelings about the lands in which they lived. ( See Connections With Literature, "Popocatépetl and Ixtacihuatl," page 806.)

### A Vast Region

The term Latin America refers to a vast cultural region. It includes the lands in the Western Hemisphere that were influenced by Spanish and Portuguese settlers. The word



### MAP STUDY

Latin America includes Mexico, Central America, the islands of the Caribbean, and South America. This region has a varied topography, but mountains and highlands are its dominant landforms.

- 1. Place** Identify the mountains that run the length of western South America.
- 2. Location** (a) Identify the largest area of lowlands in South America. (b) Describe the relative location of these lowlands.
- 3. Solving Problems** What river systems have the nations of South America probably used for transportation and trade.

Latin refers to the language that is a common root for Spanish and Portuguese.

**Subregions.** Latin America stretches for about 5,500 miles (8,851 km) from the Rio Grande in Mexico to Cape Horn at the tip of South America. This vast area has two main subregions: Middle America and South America.

Middle America lies in the Northern Hemisphere. It includes Mexico, the 7 nations of Central America, and 13 island nations and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean.\*

Much of South America lies in the Southern Hemisphere. South America has 12 independent countries and two foreign-ruled territories, the Falkland Islands and French Guiana. One country, Brazil, covers half the land and has half the population of the entire continent.

**Location.** Latin America lies between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. These oceans link countries within Latin America and connect Latin America to other regions. For centuries, the Atlantic Ocean has served as a highway

\* After the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Europeans called these islands the West Indies.

between Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Today, the Pacific Ocean is increasingly important as a trade route. Nations on the west coast of Latin America are developing close ties with Pacific Rim countries of Asia.

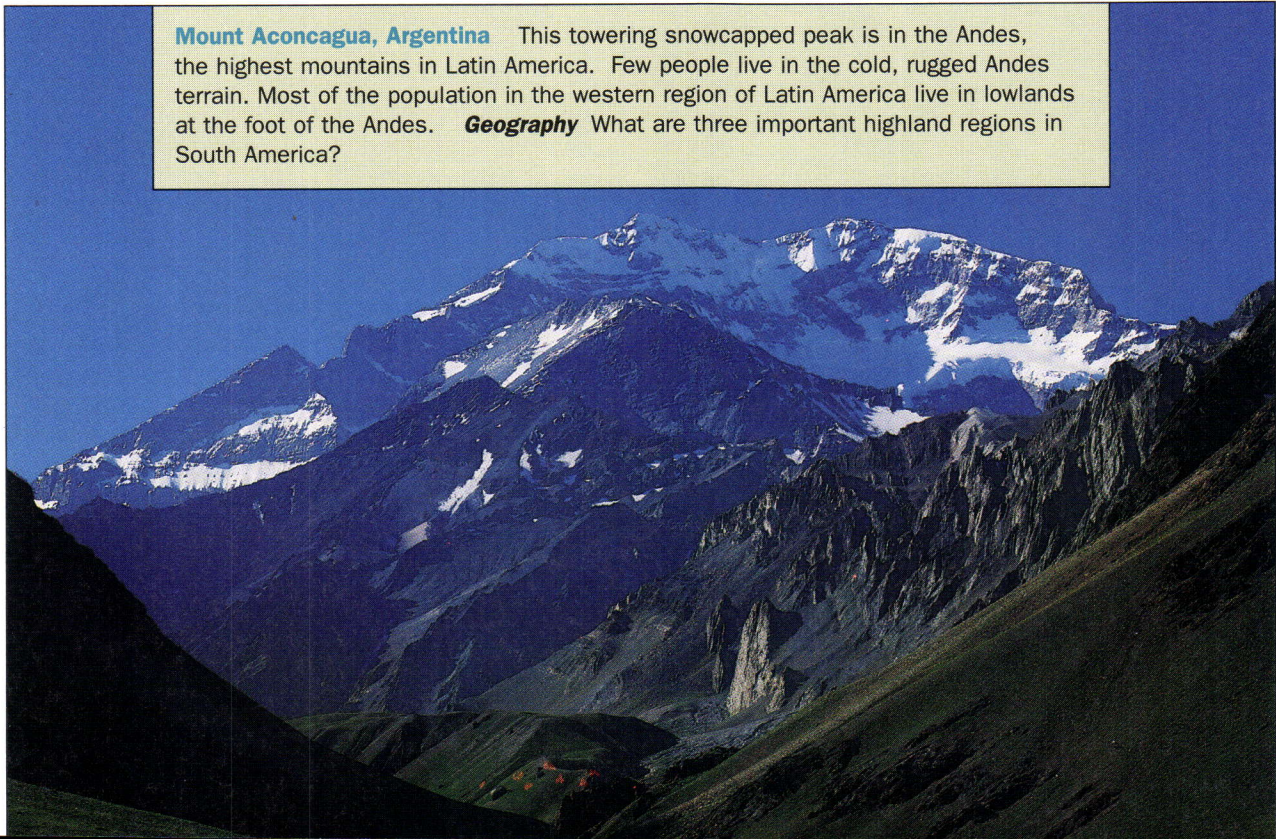
Latin America shares the Western Hemisphere with the United States and Canada. In Chapter 23, you will read about the great influence the United States has exercised over Latin America since the 1800s.

## Major Landforms

Latin America, which covers one sixth of the world's land surface, has a great variety of landforms. Much of the land consists of rugged mountains or highlands.

**Mountains and highlands.** Perhaps the most striking physical feature of Latin America is the backbone of high mountains, called La Cordillera, that run the length of the region. These mountains actually begin in the Rocky Mountains of western Canada and the United States. In Mexico, the mountains split into two ranges. The Sierra Madre West (see EHR uh MAH dray) rise along the Pacific coast, while the Sierra Madre East stand near the

**Mount Aconcagua, Argentina** This towering snowcapped peak is in the Andes, the highest mountains in Latin America. Few people live in the cold, rugged Andes terrain. Most of the population in the western region of Latin America live in lowlands at the foot of the Andes. **Geography** What are three important highland regions in South America?



coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Between them lies the Central Plateau. Mountains and highlands also cover most of Central America. Many Caribbean islands also have rugged terrain.

Running the length of western South America are the snowcapped Andes Mountains. The towering Andes have dozens of peaks that rise more than 20,000 feet (6,096 m) high and are second in height only to the great mountain ranges in Asia. Other highlands are found in eastern South America. They include the Guiana Highlands in Venezuela and the Brazilian Highlands.

**Earthquakes and volcanoes.** Mountains have created problems for Latin America. The mountains along its western edge are part of the Ring of Fire that encircles the Pacific

Ocean. Along this ring, pressure builds up deep inside the Earth and causes frequent earthquakes and volcanoes. Some volcanoes explode almost without warning and rain destruction on nearby areas.

**Lowlands.** Lowlands are found along the coasts of Mexico, Central America, and South America. Most of these coastal plains are narrow. On the Pacific side of South America, for example, the Andes Mountains extend almost to the sea.

Several wide lowland areas lie in eastern South America, as you can see from the map on page 440. The largest of these is the great Amazon Basin. It occupies 40 percent of South America and has the world's largest rain forest. Another major lowland is the **pampas**, the grassy plains that stretch from Argentina into Uruguay. There, wheat farmers and cattle ranchers have created one of the most productive farming regions in Latin America.

**Regionalism.** Mountains, along with tropical forests in the lowlands, created barriers to the movement of people. These features limited contact among areas and contributed to **regionalism**, or strong local traditions that divide people within a country or region.

**The Brazilian Rain Forest** A hiker moves through the world's largest rain forest, located in Brazil's Amazon Basin. The rain forest supports a variety of plants and animal life. It also has many resources, including valuable mahogany, cedar, rosewood, and rubber trees. **Environment** Why is the rain forest a difficult environment for humans?



## Great Rivers

Because Middle America has a rugged landscape, it has few rivers wide enough or deep enough for ships to travel on. By contrast, South America has three major river systems that provide important transportation routes.

**The mighty Amazon.** Beginning in the snowy Andes Mountains in Peru, the mighty Amazon River flows eastward across Brazil. At least 1,100 tributaries pour into the Amazon on its 4,000-mile (6,437-km) journey to the Atlantic Ocean. Because the Amazon is both wide and deep, oceangoing ships can sail 1,000 miles (1,609 km) upriver, as far as Manaus, Brazil. Smaller vessels carry cargoes as far as Iquitos, Peru, which is 2,300 miles (3,701 km) from the mouth of the Amazon.

Until the 1950s, few people lived along the river. The hot, humid climate as well as

seasonal flooding and thick vegetation made settlement difficult. Since then, many settlers have moved into the region to develop its rich resources. Today, ships haul lumber, minerals, and livestock along the Amazon from the interior to the coast.

**Orinoco.** In northern South America lies the Orinoco (or uh NOH koh) River. It starts in the Guiana Highlands and flows northward through Venezuela to the Atlantic Ocean. Like the Amazon, the Orinoco carves a path through rain forests and open plains. Freighters on the Orinoco carry iron ore, bauxite, and forest products to the Atlantic and then to overseas markets.

**Río de la Plata.** The Río de la Plata (REE oh deh lah PLAH tah), or River of Silver, forms the border between Uruguay and Argentina. Fed by several rivers in the interior, the Río de la Plata serves as a major shipping route. Farmers and ranchers on the pampas use the waterway to send grain, meat, and hides to markets around the world. Buenos Aires, at the mouth of the river, has become the world's second-busiest port.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) Rio Grande, (b) Cape Horn, (c) South America, (d) Caribbean Sea, (e) Andes Mountains.
- 2. Define:** (a) pampas, (b) regionalism.
- 3.** (a) What are the two main subregions of Latin America? (b) What areas are included in Middle America?
- 4.** (a) Name two landforms found in Latin America. (b) How have landforms contributed to regionalism?
- 5.** (a) What are three major river systems in South America? (b) List two products that people ship on each river.
- 6. Applying Ideas** (a) Why is Latin America called a cultural region? (b) What physical regions does it include?
- 7. Writing Across Cultures** List two geographic features that the United States shares with Latin America. Write a paragraph describing each feature.

## 2

# CLIMATES AND PEOPLE

### FIND OUT

Why does Latin America have many different climates?

What are the chief resources of Latin America?

What ethnic groups have contributed to the culture of Latin America?

How has geography affected population patterns in Latin America?

**Vocabulary** *tierra caliente, tierra templada, tierra fría, mestizo*

**W**aves thunder against the Pacific shore of northern Chile. Nearby lies the Atacama Desert, one of the driest places on Earth. In some parts of the desert no rain has fallen for 400 years. A few areas get as much as half an inch of rain each year.

The long, narrow Atacama Desert lies between the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The Andes are one reason for the extreme dryness of the Atacama, as you will read.

### Varied Climates

If you walked the 5,500-mile (8,851-km) length of Latin America, you would pass through many climate zones, ranging from lush tropical rain forests to frozen wastelands not far from Antarctica. Factors affecting the climates of Latin America are distance from the Equator, elevation, wind patterns, and ocean currents.

**Tropical climates.** Three fourths of Latin America lies in the tropics. Within the tropics, climates vary greatly. Some areas have a tropical wet climate. They include the Amazon Basin, some Caribbean islands, and parts of Central America. There, warm temperatures and plenty of rainfall all year support huge rain forests.

# El Niño Strikes

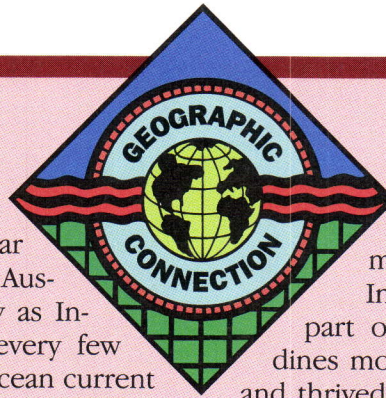
Who would believe that a change in an ocean current near Peru could cause drought in Australia and flooding as far away as India? Yet these events occur every few years when the warm Pacific Ocean current called *El Niño* strikes.

Normally, the cool Peru current flows northwestward along the Peruvian coast. The cool surface water is a good environment for many plants on which small fish, such as anchovies, feed. The abundance of fish benefits Peru's fishing industry.

Every few years, a current of warm water flows south from the Equator, forcing the Peru current to the west. This change in ocean current usually occurs close to Christmas. As a result, the warm current is known as *El Niño*, Spanish for "the Christ child."



Much of tropical Latin America, however, has a wet and dry climate. In these areas, temperatures are warm all year, but half of the year is rainy while the other half is dry. A tropical wet and dry climate is found in the lowlands of Mexico, as well as in western Central America and southern Brazil.



*El Niño* can bring disaster. The warm waters of *El Niño* kill the small plants on which the fish feed. The fish either die or migrate to other areas.

In 1972, *El Niño* destroyed a large part of the anchovy population. Sardines moved in to replace the anchovies and thrived for 10 years. In 1982, however, *El Niño* began to affect the sardines as well. The fishing industry of Peru suffered greatly.



*El Niño* also leads to drastic changes in the weather. Coastal Peru usually gets 1 to 5 inches (2.5 to 12.5 cm) of rain each year. When *El Niño* arrives, as much as 12 feet (3.6 m) of rainfall may result in some areas. The downpours erode land, wash away homes and roads, and kill hundreds of people.

In 1997 and 1998, *El Niño* caused droughts and wildfires in Indonesia and monsoons and cyclones in Madagascar. In the United States, record rainfall led to mudslides and flash floods. *El Niño* may strike at Christmas, but it is no gift.

1. What is *El Niño*?
2. **Solving Problems** Why are scientists trying to learn more about *El Niño*?

**Temperate climates.** Several regions have temperate climates, as you can see from the Atlas map on page 778. Paraguay, Uruguay, and northern Argentina have a humid subtropical climate. There, a warm season alternates with a cool season, much as in South Carolina or Georgia in the United States. The



grasslands of this region provide excellent grazing for livestock, as well as good farmland.

**Dry climates.** Parts of Latin America have dry climates. Northern Mexico and part of Argentina have a semiarid climate. Very light rainfall throughout the year allows some grasses to grow in these dry areas.

Bordering these semiarid areas are deserts. The Baja Peninsula of northwestern Mexico is a sunbaked desert. The windswept Patagonian Plateau at the tip of South America receives barely enough moisture to support stunted trees and scattered grasses. Neither of these areas is as dry as Chile's Atacama Desert, however.

The extreme dryness of the Atacama is due in part to the "rain shadow" created by the Andes. Winds blow west from the Atlantic across South America, dropping their moisture as they reach the Andes. As a result, the eastern slopes of the Andes and the Amazon Basin receive drenching rains. The western side of the Andes, however, remains very dry.

Ocean currents also affect the Atacama. Warm winds that blow east from the Pacific Ocean pass over the icy Peru current, which runs up the west coast of South America. These winds drop their moisture at sea, so only dry winds reach the land.

## Elevation and Climate

In much of Latin America, the chief influence on climate is elevation above sea level. Within a single country, the climate can vary enormously, depending on whether you are in the lowlands or the highlands. People in Latin America have their own terms for these variations in climate.

Closest to sea level is the **tierra caliente**, or hot land. Lowlands such as the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico and the Amazon Basin are located in the tierra caliente. In these regions, tropical crops such as bananas and sugarcane flourish.

The next zone, the **tierra templada**, or temperate land, includes areas that lie above 3,000 feet (914 m). There, the days are hot, but the nights are cool. The Central Plateau and the valleys in the Andes are part of the tierra templada. Many cities are also found in

this temperate zone. Coffee and tobacco thrive at this altitude.

The third zone is the **tierra fría**, or cold land. This zone includes highlands that are at least 6,000 feet (1,829 m) above sea level. There, nighttime and winter temperatures can be quite cool. Major cities such as Mexico City and Bogotá lie in the tierra fría. Farmers who live in this zone grow wheat, barley, and potatoes.

## Natural Resources

Parts of Latin America are rich in natural resources. Some of its countries have valuable mineral or agricultural resources. Others, especially the islands of the Caribbean, have relatively few resources. Most Latin Americans have not benefited from the vast resources of Latin America. As you will read, the Spanish, and later the wealthy ruling groups, exploited these resources in order to promote their own interests.

**Minerals.** Gold and silver are the minerals that lured many Europeans to the Americas. Today, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru are still producing large quantities of these precious metals.

Latin America has other minerals, too. Chile is the world's leading producer of copper. In Bolivia, miners extract huge amounts of tin each year. Jamaica, Guyana, and Suriname have major deposits of bauxite, the clay-like ore from which aluminum is extracted.

**Energy resources.** Some Latin American countries have abundant supplies of oil and natural gas. Mexico and Venezuela have experienced the "boom and bust" of rising and falling oil prices. Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru also have large oil deposits.

In parts of Latin America, heavy rains fill rivers that cascade down from the highlands. Countries from Mexico to Paraguay have harnessed the force of these rivers to produce hydroelectric power. Brazil, for example, has seven of the world's largest hydroelectric plants.

**Agricultural resources.** The economies of many Latin American countries depend on the export of cash crops such as bananas, sugar, tobacco, coffee, and rubber. In addition, the rain forests of Brazil and Central America provide the world with valuable lumber.

**Problems of economic dependence.** The export of farm products and minerals has contributed to economic dependence in Latin America. Countries that rely on single crops or goods are at the mercy of world demand. Also, natural disasters such as hurricanes and frost can destroy an entire harvest. Since the 1950s, Latin American countries have worked to achieve greater independence by diversifying their economies.

## Peoples of Latin America

In Guatemalan villages, many children speak their local Indian language before they learn Spanish. In Buenos Aires, people speak Spanish with an Italian accent, a reminder of the millions of Italians who settled in Argentina. In Brazil and the Caribbean, people tell folktales based on stories brought from Africa. These facts suggest the variety of people who live in Latin America and have contributed to the cultures of this region.

**Native Americans.** Before Christopher Columbus reached the Americas, about 80 million Native Americans lived in the Western Hemisphere. They spoke a variety of languages and had many different cultures. Some lived in large cities. Others were farmers or hunters and food gatherers. Although the arrival of Europeans led to the death of millions of Native Americans, their cultures survived in many parts of Latin America.

**Europeans and Asians.** After 1492, Europeans began to settle in Latin America. They included Spanish and Portuguese as well as French, Dutch, and English settlers. Many Spanish and Portuguese settlers married

Native Americans. Their children formed a new ethnic group called **mestizos**, people of mixed European and Native American ancestry.

During the 1800s, thousands of Asians settled in Latin America. They included Indians and Chinese who took jobs on plantations after the abolition, or end, of slavery. During the same period, European immigrants flocked into Latin America, as they did to the United States. Many Italians went to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. Germans, British, and other Europeans settled elsewhere in South America.

**Africans.** Many people in Latin America trace their roots to Africa. Between about 1500 and 1800, slave traders carried millions of Africans to the Americas. Africans were forced to work as slaves on plantations and in mines in the Caribbean, Brazil, and elsewhere.

**Ethnic and cultural mix.** Latin American countries have a mixture of ethnic groups. In some countries, such as Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, most of the people are mestizos. Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador all have a large population of Native Americans. Many Brazilians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Jamaicans have African ancestors, while large numbers of people of European background live in Costa Rica, Argentina, and Uruguay.

## Population Patterns

Geography has influenced where people in Latin America live. A few areas are densely populated, while many others are sparsely settled. Few people can live in the rugged mountains, deserts, or rain forests because



**Lunch Break at Ponce** Students in Ponce, Puerto Rico's third-largest city, pose for their picture. Their faces suggest Latin America's ethnic diversity. The facial features and skin color of the population reflect Native American, European, and African backgrounds.

**Diversity** What ethnic group in Latin America has both European and Native American ancestry? In which nations does this group make up the majority?


## SECTION 2 REVIEW

these areas are so unfavorable to farming. Instead, people are concentrated in temperate highland areas and along the coastal plains. In Brazil, for example, the largest cities are Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo on the coast. The area between the Atlantic Ocean and the Andes Mountains has few cities. In the 1950s, the government of Brazil tried to open up the interior by building a new capital city at Brasília. (See the feature on page 6.)

**Limited farmland.** Climate and rugged terrain do more than limit where people live. They severely limit the amount of arable land that is available. Only about 6 percent of Latin America is suitable for farming, compared with 20 percent of the United States.

Through irrigation, however, people in Latin America have created farmland in desert areas. Mexico has built water projects that now make it possible to channel water from mountain streams to the northern desert. In these irrigated desert lands, farmers produce crops of cotton, wheat, and vegetables.

In Central America and Brazil, developers have cleared the rain forests to open up new farmland. The soil in the rain forests, however, is not very fertile. These cleared lands support crops for only a few years before they wear out, forcing farmers to move on. As in tropical Africa, leaching and erosion damage the land.

**Difficult communication.** Landforms and climate have limited contact between people in coastal areas and the interior. During colonial times, cities such as Buenos Aires had closer ties to Spain, across the Atlantic, than to the interior of Argentina. (  See Connections With Literature, page 806, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World.”)

Differences in culture also contributed to the gap between coastal cities and the interior. Often, the interior was a stronghold of Native American or mestizo cultures, in contrast to the European culture of the cities.

Today, radio, television, telephones, and air travel link cities and rural areas in a way that was not possible in the past. Despite the changes brought by modernization, differences between urban and rural areas are greater in Latin America than in countries such as the United States.

1. **Locate:** (a) Atacama Desert, (b) Yucatán Peninsula, (c) Buenos Aires, (d) Rio de Janeiro.
2. **Define:** (a) tierra caliente, (b) tierra templada, (c) tierra fría, (d) mestizo.
3. Name one area of Latin America that is in each of the climate zones created by elevation.
4. What resources are important to Latin America?
5. Give two examples of how geography has affected where people live in Latin America.
6. **Synthesizing** Why are few major cities located in the interior of Brazil between the Atlantic Ocean and the Andes Mountains?
7. **Writing Across Cultures** Write a dialogue in which students discuss the similarities between the peoples of Latin America and the peoples of the United States.

## 3

### EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

#### FIND OUT

What early civilizations developed in the Americas?

What were the major achievements of these civilizations?

How did the arrival of Europeans affect the first American civilizations?

**Vocabulary** maize, quipu, conquistador

**T**he desperate inhabitants of the parched lands of northern Mexico struggled to survive. Over several centuries, these people, later known as the Aztecs, slowly moved southward onto the Central Plateau. In 1325, according to legend, the Aztec god Uitzilopochtli (wee tsee loh POUCH tlee) told the

people where to settle: "Search until you find this sign—an eagle perched atop a cactus holding a snake in its beak."

Soon afterward, the Aztecs found the sign on an island in Lake Texcoco. There, they built the city of Tenochtitlán (tay nawch tee TLAHN). Today, Mexico City stands on the spot where the Aztec capital once flourished. The eagle, snake, and cactus have become the national symbols of Mexico, as shown in the Mexican flag.

The Aztecs were one of many Native American civilizations that emerged in what is today Latin America. Like people everywhere, they built on the successes of earlier civilizations.

## The First Americans

Thousands of years before the Aztecs built Tenochtitlán, nomadic people migrated from Asia into North America. During the last Ice Age, huge glaciers froze so much water that ocean levels dropped, exposing a land bridge that connected Siberia to Alaska. The first people to cross that land bridge may have reached the Americas about 50,000 years ago. Slowly, some groups moved southward into Central America and South America. In time, they reached the southern tip of South America.

The earliest Americans lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants. About 5,000 years ago, however, people in Mexico began to farm. They grew **maize**, or corn, and planted other crops such as beans and squash. As in other parts of the world, farming allowed people to give up their nomadic way of life and settle in villages. As farming methods improved, people in some areas produced the food surpluses that were needed to support advanced civilizations.

## Maya Cities

“ Their books were written on large sheets of paper doubled in folds, which were enclosed entirely between boards which they decorated, and they wrote on both sides in columns following the order of the folds. And they made this paper from the roots of a tree. ”

A Spanish priest wrote that description of the books kept by the ancient Mayas. Writing, books, and paper were a few of the remarkable achievements of the Mayas. By the time the Spanish reached the Americas, Maya civilization was more than 2,000 years old.

The ancient Mayas lived in the dense, lowland rain forests of Central America. Between about A.D. 300 and A.D. 900, their civilization reached its peak. Prosperous Maya cities ruled the lands from the Yucatán Peninsula to what is today Guatemala. A network of roads linked cities such as Tikal (tee KAHL) in Guatemala and Palenque (puh LEHN kay) in Mexico. Merchants did a brisk trade carrying goods, such as cotton cloth and ornate gold jewelry, from one city to another. They shipped other goods to distant lands in oceangoing canoes.

**Farming.** How did these cities thrive in the difficult tropical environment? Scientists have only recently learned how the Mayas developed complex farming methods to produce enough food to support city life.

In low-lying areas, Maya farmers cleared the dense forests and then built raised fields for crops. These platforms caught and held rainwater. If too much rain fell, farmers opened channels to drain the fields. The system worked so well that farmers produced corn and other crops to feed themselves plus a surplus to feed cities that had as many as 20,000 people.

**Government and society.** Trade, language, and a common culture linked the Mayas, although they had no single, unified empire. Instead, each Maya city-state had its own king, who was the most important military and religious leader. Below him, nobles and priests helped to govern the city. Artisans and merchants were next in the social order. They supplied the ruling class with fine cloth, gold ornaments, and feathered cloaks, and benefited from trade with other city-states.

The largest group of people included peasants and laborers. They grew food and hauled stone to build splendid temples and palaces. At the lowest level of Maya society were slaves, usually people captured in war or criminals.

**Religion.** Like other ancient peoples, the Mayas believed that gods controlled the powerful forces of nature. Each day, priests performed the rituals they believed would please the gods. Without those ceremonies, the gods might send storms, drought, or other disasters.

At the center of Maya cities were huge pyramid-temples built to honor different gods. Some pyramids towered 20 stories above the ground. On the walls of the temples, artists painted brilliantly colored murals. These scenes recorded historical events or told ancient legends. Surrounding the temples were the stone palaces of priests and nobles.

Maya cities had a large rectangular stone court that was used for a ball game called pok-a-tok. Like modern basketball, the game involved sending a ball through a hoop. Unlike basketball, the ball was about the size of a softball, and the hoop was set vertically 30 feet (9 m) above the ground. Also, players were not allowed to use their hands to catch or throw the ball. Ordinary people played the game for fun. When nobles played the game, however, it took on religious meaning. Priests then watched the game carefully, believing that the gods sent messages by allowing one side or another to win.

## Maya Achievements

The magnificent buildings the Mayas erected are proof of their great skills in architecture. The Mayas also left evidence of many other achievements. Maya priests developed a system of writing, using hieroglyphics. Scholars are just beginning to decipher Maya “glyphs.” Most glyphs carved on temples and stone pillars seem to concern religious and historical events.

Maya priests made important advances in the sciences. Priest-astronomers studied the sky in order to measure the passage of time. As in other ancient societies, the priests needed to know when they should tell peasants to plant and harvest crops.

Based on careful observation and years of records, the priests developed a  $365\frac{1}{4}$ -day



**Maya Warriors** This wall painting on a Maya temple shows warriors in combat using deadly sharp knives and spears. Other wall paintings show the bright colors of clothing worn by the Mayas and their fine ornaments made of feathers, gold, copper, and jade. **Fine Art** How do wall paintings help us learn about early civilizations?

calendar—the most accurate calendar in the world at the time. From their study of the stars, the priests also developed complex mathematics. They learned to use zero, a breakthrough that allowed them to express numbers of any size.

Maya cities began to decline in about 800. Historians do not know why this happened. Disease or war may have weakened Maya society. Some experts think that high taxes may have led peasants to rebel against their rulers. By 900, most people had abandoned the cities, but Maya culture survived and influenced other people, from Central America to Mexico.

## Early Civilizations in Latin America



### MAP STUDY

Several great civilizations developed in Latin America. These early civilizations were established in South America, Central America, and Mexico.

- 1. Location** (a) Which early Native American empire was located in the Yucatan Peninsula? (b) What was its capital city?
- 2. Interaction** Among which Native American cultures would you expect to find the most similarities? Explain
- 3. Analyzing Information** What challenges might the Incas have faced in keeping their empire united?

## The Aztec Empire

Long after the Maya cities had declined, the Aztecs built an advanced civilization to the north and west of Maya lands. The Aztecs moved into the Central Plateau of Mexico in about 1200. There, they came into contact with people like the Toltecs, who had absorbed ideas from the Mayas. From the Toltecs, the Aztecs learned to build pyramid-

temples and indirectly absorbed other ideas from the Mayas.

**Government.** After settling in Tenochtitlán, the Aztecs embarked on a course of conquest. Unlike the Maya city-states, each of which had its own king, the Aztecs had only one ruler. He was chosen by a small group of priests, nobles, and warriors. With their help, the Aztec ruler gained control of a vast territory.

By about 1450, Aztec warriors began to attack and defeat the city-states that bordered Tenochtitlán. When the Aztecs defeated a nation, they left its rulers in place. However, the defeated nation had to pay tribute to the Aztecs in the form of maize, tobacco, gold, precious stones, and jaguar skins. By 1500, the Aztecs were collecting tribute from about 500 city-states.

As the Aztecs expanded, they took thousands of prisoners of war. They kept some captives as slaves, but they sacrificed many others to their god of war. The Aztecs believed that their success in war depended on such human sacrifices. The slaughter of captives made the Aztecs feared and hated throughout Mexico.

**Religion.** Like the Mayas, the Aztecs worshipped many gods. Priests had a powerful place in Aztec society. Priests were the guardians of the many huge temples in Tenochtitlán. Only they could perform the rituals that were thought to please the gods. They also recorded knowledge of science, mathematics, and medicine in books.

Among the chief Aztec gods was Quetzalcoatl (keht suhl koh AHT l), who they believed had brought maize to the Earth. According to legend, Quetzalcoatl had once taken human form and ruled the land. Then, disaster struck his kingdom, and this light-skinned, bearded ruler was banished. As he sailed off into the "eastern sea," he vowed to return one day. The legend of Quetzalcoatl would have tragic consequences for the Aztecs, as you will read.

**Tenochtitlán.** At the heart of the Aztec empire was the bustling city of Tenochtitlán. By 1500, it was home to 150,000 people, making it the largest city in the world at the time. To provide food, the Aztecs developed ways to farm the swampy land of Lake Texcoco.

Farmers filled large reed rafts with earth and anchored them in the lake bed. On these small floating islands, or *chinampas*, they planted their crops.

In Tenochtitlán's busy central market, merchants sold goods from all over the empire. A Spanish soldier described the many activities of the market:

“ There is an orderly arrangement of wares so that each kind is sold separately in its proper place. . . . [Here] they sell mantles and various kinds of men's dress, while women's dresses are sold elsewhere. There is a place for the sale of shoes, another for tanned deer hides. . . . Cotton is sold in yet another place, and grain here and bread there, of various kinds. ”

**Education.** The Aztecs were among the first people to educate both boys and girls. Aztec children studied civics, history, and religion. To prepare for their future, boys received training in the arts of war. Girls stud-

ied homemaking skills and learned herbal medicine.

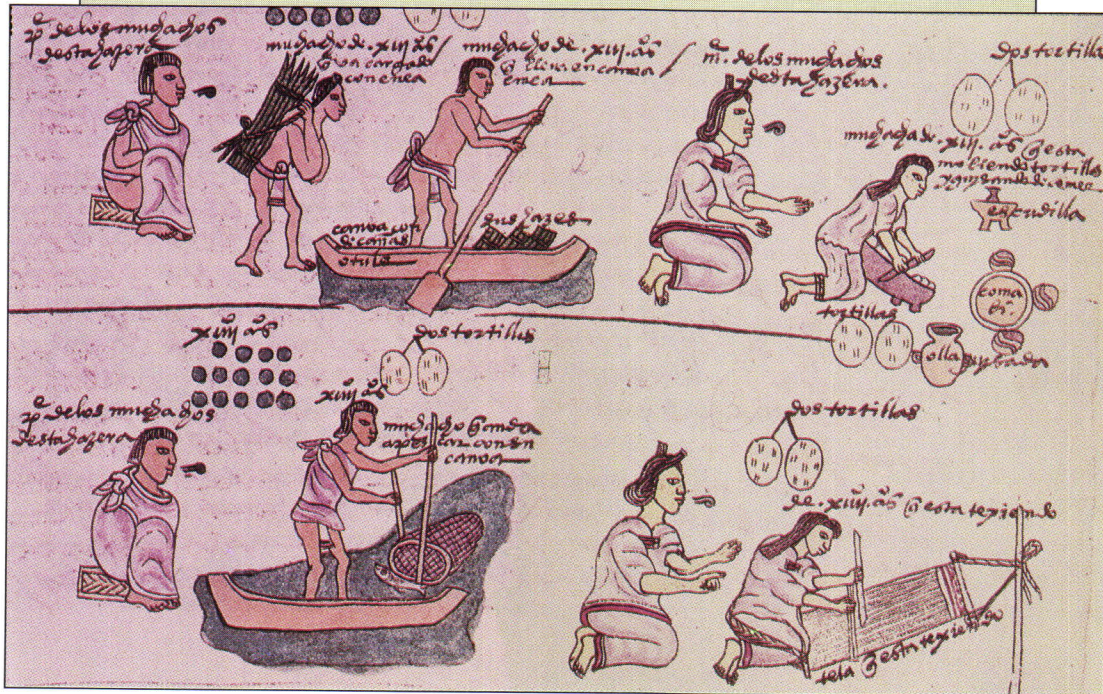
**Women.** Aztec women had certain rights. A woman could own property, and she could remarry if her husband died. Some women became priestesses, weavers, musicians, and midwives. Most of them spent their days at the time-consuming tasks of preparing food and making clothing for the family. One father's advice to his daughter shows what was expected of an Aztec woman:

“ How will you fulfill your womanly duties? Will you not prepare the food, the drink? Will you not spin and weave? Look well how are the food and drink, how they are made, that they should be good, know how good food and drink are prepared. ”

## The Inca Empire

Far to the south of the Aztec Empire lay the powerful Inca civilization. From their capital at Cuzco, the Incas built a vast empire in the fertile valleys of the Andes. Like the

**Aztec Education** Pictures in an Aztec book show how the Aztecs taught their children. At left, a father teaches his son how to gather firewood, canoe, and fish. The mother, at right, instructs her daughter in grinding grain and weaving cloth.  
**Technology** What items of Aztec technology are shown here?



Aztecs, the Incas acquired skills and learning from earlier peoples in the area. By the late 1400s, the Inca Empire stretched 2,500 miles (4,023 km) across what is today Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile.

**Farming.** The Incas were able to feed a population of 9 million people in part because they developed skilled farming methods. From earlier civilizations in the region, they learned to build complex irrigation systems that channeled water from mountain streams into the dry lowlands. They created farmland by carving terraces on steep mountainsides. By using fertilizer, they produced huge crops of corn, potatoes, and beans. Modern scientists have studied Inca farming methods to improve crop production today.

**Religion.** Like the Mayas and the Aztecs, the Incas worshipped many gods. Chief among them was the sun god. In fact, the word Inca means “children of the sun.” The Inca royal family claimed to be descended from the sun god.

The center of Inca worship was the Temple of the Sun in Cuzco. Sheets of gold covered the temple walls, flaming in the Andean sun. To the Incas, gold was “the sweat of the gods.” Priests and priestesses performed ceremonies to honor the sun god.

**Government.** The Inca emperor owned all the land, mines, and wealth of the empire. He ruled with the aid of nobles and priests. Officials told the people where to live and what jobs to do. They assigned plots of land to peasants to farm and collected taxes on peasants’ crops. The smooth running of the empire also depended on an elaborate communications network.

## Up Close

### The Efficient Incas

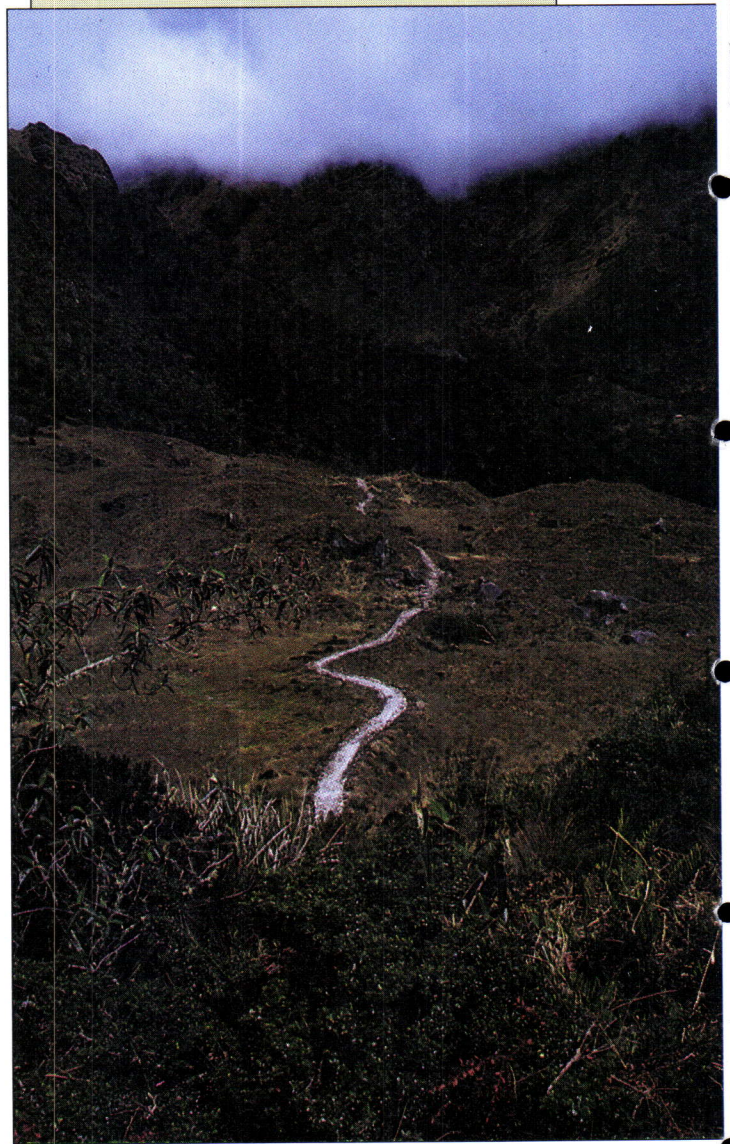
A young Inca crouched by the side of a mountain road. Let us call him Cusi Puma. His body was tense as he watched a point 100 yards (91 m) down the road. There, the highway disappeared over a ridge.

The young man was a *chasqui*, or runner. Assigned to this stretch of the highway, he

was one of hundreds of messengers who helped to carry news across the Inca Empire.

To keep order in their empire, the Incas improved and extended the network of roads built by earlier people. The roads provided a

**An Inca Highway** A winding road crosses a small valley high in the Andes. The mountain highways of the Inca Empire stretched thousands of miles from north to south. To construct these roads, Inca engineers cut steps into steep mountainsides. They also used rope cables to build bridges across deep gorges. **Power** Why did the Incas need this vast network of roads?





route for armies and messengers. Pedro Cieza de León, a Spanish soldier and writer of the time, marveled at one of these Inca roads:

“It passes over deep valleys and lofty mountains by snowy heights, over falls of water, through living rocks and edges of tortuous currents. In all these places, it is level and paved, along mountain slopes well excavated, by the mountains well terraced . . . along the river bank supported by walls, in the snowy heights with steps and resting places. ”

Cusi Puma's job began the moment another chasqui appeared on the road. He would dash out to meet him. Falling in stride alongside the tired runner, he would memorize the message he was given. Sometimes the messenger had to carry a **quipu**, or knotted string, to the next chasqui. The Incas, lacking a system of writing, used the quipu to keep records and accounts of such things as the size of a harvest.

With a fresh burst of speed, the young runner would race off, following the road as it zigzagged uphill. After three miles, the runner reached the next relay stop. There, he would pass the message on to another chasqui.

Through this efficient system of relays, a message could travel as far as 200 miles (322 km) a day. If a revolt occurred in one part of the empire, the ruler would learn of it quickly and send his armies to crush the rebels. Officials, too, used the roads for business, but the common people could not. ■

## The Great Empires Fall

Both the Inca and the Aztec empires reached the peak of their power in about 1500. By then, Columbus had claimed the islands of the Caribbean and the nearby mainland for Spain.

Within a few years, **conquistadors**, or Spanish conquerors, were following Columbus to the Americas. They fanned out across Middle America and South America, hunting for the gold kingdoms that rumor described.

“We came here to serve God and the king, and also to get rich,” declared one conquistador about his motives for going to the Americas. Many Catholic priests went with the Spanish to the Americas. Once on shore, they set out to convert the Native Americans they found there to Christianity.

**Cortés in Mexico.** Hernando Cortés (kor TEHZ) landed on the coast of Mexico in 1519. As soon as he heard about the fabulous riches of the Aztec Empire, he made a daring plan to conquer it. With about 600 men, 16 horses, and 14 cannons, he marched on Tenochtitlán. Within two years, the Spanish destroyed the powerful Aztec Empire. How did a tiny Spanish force defeat the Aztecs?

Many factors helped Cortés. First, the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma (mok tuh zoo muh), hesitated to fight the Spanish. He believed that Cortés was the god-king Quetzalcoatl, returning as he had promised he would. Second, Cortés won allies among the people the Aztecs had conquered. Their armies strengthened the Spanish forces. Third, smallpox and other diseases that Europeans brought to the Americas killed thousands of Aztecs.

In addition, the Spanish rode horses, animals the Aztecs had never seen before. These strange animals terrified many Aztec soldiers. The metal armor, muskets, and cannons of the Spanish only increased the Aztecs' fears.

**Pizarro in Peru.** Similar events soon took place in South America. Like Cortés in Mexico, Francisco Pizarro had heard rumors of the great wealth of the Inca Empire. In 1532, he landed on the coast of Peru. There, Pizarro learned that the Incas had just emerged from a terrible civil war. Although the emperor Atahualpa (ah tah WAHL pah) retained his power, the fighting had weakened the empire.

Once again, a handful of Spanish soldiers riding horses and armed with muskets spread terror among the Indian armies. Disease, too, killed many of those who might have fought the invaders.

Pizarro used trickery to capture Atahualpa. The Inca emperor then offered to buy his freedom by filling a room with gold treasure.



**Gold Ceremonial Weapon** A gold-and-turquoise Inca knife is one of the few early Native American art objects that survived the Spanish conquest. Priceless works of art, such as golden ears of corn in silver baskets, were seized by Cortés and his army and destroyed. **Fine Art** Why did the Spanish melt down many gold and silver art objects?

Pizarro agreed to this, but then seized the treasure and murdered Atahualpa. Without a strong leader, organized Inca resistance faltered. By 1535, Pizarro controlled the vast Inca Empire.

### Resistance and Survival

Intent on gaining riches and converting the Native Americans, Spanish soldiers and

priests destroyed much of the material wealth of Native American cultures. The invaders melted down gold and silver objects of great beauty. They burned books and smashed sculptures and temples. Only a few ornaments and manuscripts survived the destruction.

Throughout the Americas, Native Americans fought against the invaders. Even after the Spanish completed their conquest, rebellions were frequent. Among the most famous was the 1780 uprising led by Túpac Amaru II, a descendant of the last Inca emperor.

Native Americans who survived the conquest preserved much of their cultural heritage. Today, millions of people in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia speak Quechua, the language of the Incas. In Guatemala and Mexico, Indian groups speak many languages that are of Maya origin. Temples, pyramids, and terraced hillsides stand today as evidence of the great Native American civilizations.

## SECTION 3 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) Tenochtitlán, (b) Tikal, (c) Cuzco.
- 2. Identify:** (a) Quetzalcoatl, (b) Hernando Cortés, (c) Moctezuma, (d) Francisco Pizarro, (e) Atahualpa.
- 3. Define:** (a) maize, (b) quipu, (c) conquistador.
- 4.** (a) What three civilizations developed in the Americas? (b) Where was each located?
- 5.** Describe two achievements of each of the early American civilizations.
- 6.** Give three reasons why the Spanish were able to defeat the Aztecs and the Incas.
- 7. Linking Past and Present** “As long as the world may endure, the fame and glory of Tenochtitlán will never perish,” claimed an Aztec carving. Do you agree with this statement? Explain.
- 8. Writing Across Cultures** Write a brief paragraph comparing the purpose of roads in the Inca Empire with the purpose of roads in the United States.