

FIELD: EARTH SCIENCE GEOGRAPHY

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1. Discuss The Many Geographical Assets Of North America (Both Physical And Human).

Identifying the Boundaries

The geographic center of North America is located near Rugby, North Dakota. Notice the flags of Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

The realm of North America as a continent extends from the polar regions of the Arctic in northern Canada and Alaska all the way south through Mexico and the countries of Central America. Geographers usually study the continent by dividing it into two separate realms based on differences in physical and cultural geography. Both the United States and Canada share similar physical geography characteristics as well as a common development history with either a British or French colonial legacy. Mexico and Central America are dominated by more tropical climates and were colonized mainly by the Spanish. The United States and Canada—the second- and third-largest countries in the world in physical area, respectively—make up more than 13 percent of the world’s total landmass. The Atlantic Ocean borders their eastern edge, and the Pacific Ocean creates their western boundary. To the north is the Arctic Ocean. The North American region is highly urbanized—about 80 percent of the population lives in cities—but other vast areas, especially in Canada, are sparsely populated. Although some natives remain, most of North America’s diverse population consists of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from other world regions. The United States is the world’s largest economy, and both countries enjoy high standards of living as technologically developed countries.

1.1 Introducing the Realm

Learning Objectives

1. Define the physiographic regions of North America.
2. Explain the two dominant climate patterns in North America.
3. Find out which three European countries had the most significant early influence on North America, what parts of the region they dominated, and what their long-term impacts have been.
4. Determine the population distribution of the United States and Canada.

North America is divided into a number of physical regions with distinct landforms. The western part of the continent is marked by north-south mountain ranges in the **Rocky Mountains** and **Pacific Mountains and Valleys** physiographic provinces, with the Intermontane Basins and Plateaus in between. The eastern portion of North America is defined by the ancient Appalachian Highlands, a mountain range that is much less rugged than the Rockies but with no less influence on the history and development of the United States. The interior of the continent is characterized by plains—the **Interior Lowlands** and the Great Plains. To the north is the **Canadian Shield**, geologically the oldest part of North America, and a sparsely populated area with poor soils. At the southern and eastern edge of the continent is the **Gulf-Atlantic Coastal Plain**, a relatively flat zone that extends from New York to Texas.

Figure 4.2 Physical Regions of the United States and Canada



The climates of the United States and Canada include the frigid type E climate of the tundra of northern Canada and Alaska, the tropical type A climate of southern Florida and Hawaii, the type C climates of the humid eastern United States, the seasonal type D climates of the northern United States and most of Canada, and the arid type B climates of the Southwest and Great Plains. In general, there are two different climate patterns common in North America. The first pattern is that temperatures get warmer as you travel from north to south and get closer to the equator. The second pattern is that there is a decrease in precipitation as you move from east to west across the continent until you reach the Pacific Coast, where rainfall is abundant again.

The second climate pattern is created by the rain shadow effect of the western mountain ranges. As wet air masses move from the Pacific Ocean over the North American continent, they run into the Cascades and the Sierra Nevada. The Cascade ranges of Washington State and Oregon cut off moisture from falling on the leeward side of the mountains; thus eastern Washington State and eastern Oregon are semiarid. The western United States experiences a strong rain

shadow effect. As the air rises to pass the mountains, water vapor condenses and is released as rain and snow. This means that west of these mountain ranges there is much more precipitation than to their east, resulting in arid and semiarid lands. The entire Great Plains of the western United States are affected by the rain shadow effect and have a semiarid type B climate.

European Realms in North America

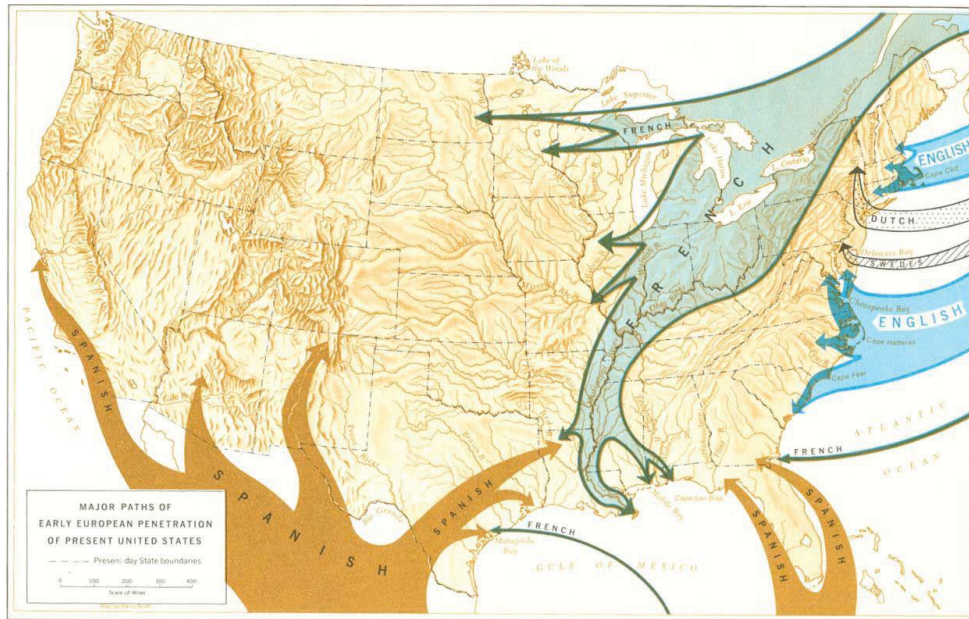
Both the United States and Canada are products of European colonialism. North America was inhabited by many Native American groups before the Europeans arrived. Complex native societies, federations, and traditional local groups faced the European invasion. While the indigenous population of North America was robust at the time of the European encounter, within a few generations, these native peoples were overwhelmed by the diseases, weapons, and sheer numbers of the European arrivals.

The Europeans—mainly the Spanish, French, and British—left a strong imprint on their North American colonies. The oldest colonial city in North America is St. Augustine, Florida (1565), founded by Spain when Florida was a remote portion of the Spanish Americas. Spain also had outposts in what are now California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The forms of settlement characteristic of those areas were similar to the Spanish colonies of Central America. While Spain governed what is now the southern United States, France ruled Canada and much of the interior of the North American continent. The French first came to Canada in the late 1500s to engage in fishing in the North Atlantic and soon expanded their reach by creating a fur trade in the area surrounding the **Great Lakes** and throughout the **Mississippi River** system.

Although there were fewer settlers from France than from other European countries—especially in what became the United States—this French era left behind place names (Baton Rouge and Detroit), patterns of land use, and a French-speaking population in Canada. Despite the early influence of Spain and France in North America, most North Americans speak English as their native language as a result of Britain's colonial dominance in the United States and Canada. The earliest permanent British colony, Jamestown, was founded in 1607 in what became Virginia. The British built up a successful empire in the New World. Their thirteen American colonies became populous, economically robust, and militarily strong enough to gain independence in

1776. Canada functions as an independent country but remains part of the British Commonwealth.

Figure 4.3 European Influence in the Colonial United States



Population Distribution in North America

The US population surpassed the three hundred million mark in 2006. Canada now has over thirty-four million people. The US population is growing by about 2.5 million people each year. A little less than half the growth can be attributed to immigration and the rest to birth rates. The pace of growth is slower than the world average but more rapid than many other industrialized countries such as those in Europe.

The population is not uniformly spread over North America, nor are the population growth rates the same in all locations. Most Canadians live in near proximity to the US border. The North American population tends to be clustered in cities, with about 80 percent of US citizens residing in urban/suburban areas. Additionally, over time, the population has been moving southward and westward. US states experiencing the greatest rates of population growth include those located on the southern portion of the eastern seaboard, as well as Texas, Nevada, Utah, California, Oregon, and Washington. Three states—California, Texas, and Florida—accounted for about a

third of the entire US population growth since 1990. Still, the Northeast is the most densely populated area of the country thanks, in large part, to the megalopolis that forms the corridor and encompasses the cities from Washington, DC, north to Boston. The largest concentration of Canadians lives in the most southern-reaching province of Ontario. For this reason, the province of Ontario is often referred to as South Canada.

In general, the population of minorities is growing most rapidly. Some of the fastest-growing populations in the United States are Hispanics. Another interesting factor in population growth is the increase in life expectancy. As more people live longer, the growth of the segment of the population aged sixty-five has doubled in the last fifty years. However, it appears that the growth of this population segment is slowing. Of this group, the greatest increase was seen in people aged eighty-five years and older.

The American population tends to be on the move. The US Census Bureau data show that the average American moves once every seven years; these data further predict that about forty million people move each year. Data also indicate Americans will move to a metropolitan area. Urbanization has been a trend since about 1950. Until that time, most Americans lived in small towns or more rural settings. The population density of the cities, and especially the suburban areas, has grown steadily since that time, bringing about a rural-to-urban population shift. Now a significant majority of people in North America live in suburban areas.

Urbanization has brought some challenges. The layout of these areas often makes owning a car a necessity; thus traffic congestion is a major problem in many suburban and urban areas. Other issues that have arisen are overcrowded schools, racial tensions, and a widening economic gap between the wealthy and impoverished. As people move to the cities, housing and other resources might not be able to meet demand, forcing prices upward. The gap between the cost of living in an urban area and the population's ability to pay has contributed to poverty and homelessness. Environmental issues also abound, including how to reduce or eliminate smog, manage waste, and ensure adequate clean water supplies.

Key Takeaways

- The United States and Canada have mountain ranges along their eastern and western portions, with lowlands in the middle.
- In general, temperatures get cooler as you move from south to north, and the climate gets more arid as you move from east to west across the continent.
- The Spanish were the earliest Europeans to establish a permanent settlement in the United States or Canada. They controlled the territory in the southern edge of what is now the United States, and their influence is still felt today through the Mexican American culture in that region.
- The French colonized eastern Canada, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River valley. Although the number of settlers was small outside Quebec, French place names and French land-use patterns are still evident.
- The British colonized the eastern coast of what became the United States. The number of English-speaking settlers was so high that the English culture dominated the region and left a strong long-term impact in terms of language, religion, and many other cultural aspects.
- The more than 310 million people who live in the United States and the more than 34 million people who live in Canada are not evenly distributed across North America. The realm continues to urbanize, and minority groups are the fastest-growing segment of the population.

1.2 United States: Early Development and Globalization

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how the United States acquired its geographic boundaries.
2. Examine patterns of immigration to and migration within the United States through the period of westward settlement.
3. Examine urban growth and its connection to development of new forms of transportation.
4. Explain which economic patterns helped the United States become the world's largest economy.
5. Consider how the concept of the American Dream has been exported globally.

Early Development Patterns

With abundant resources and opportunity, the original thirteen colonies prospered and expanded into what became the fifty US states. The political geography of this nation was a product of various treaties and acquisitions that eventually resulted in the country extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Fueling the expansion was the concept of Manifest Destiny: the belief of some Americans that the new nation was divinely predestined to expand across the continent. The United States negotiated with France for the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, acquiring millions of acres in the central United States (see [Figure 4.5 "Geopolitical Map of the Creation of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific"](#)). Florida was acquired from Spain in 1819, and Texas was annexed in 1845. The British sold portions of the Pacific Northwest to the United States, and the exact northern boundary between the United States and Canada was settled in 1846. Through conflicts with Mexico, large portions of the West were ceded to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Alaska was purchased from the Russians in 1867 for only \$7.2 million. Alaska and Hawaii were the last two possessions to enter into statehood, which they did in 1959.

Figure 4.4 The Thirteen Original Colonies



Figure 4.5 Geopolitical Map of the Creation of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific



Manifest Destiny

The concept of Manifest Destiny came from the works of John O’Sullivan in 1839. O’Sullivan wrote,

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God’s natural and moral law of equality, the law of brotherhood—of “peace and good will amongst men.”

As the United States developed, it acquired external colonial possessions. With victory over Spain in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the US government gained control of the

Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and various Pacific islands. Cuba and the Philippines later became independent countries, but Puerto Rico and Guam continue to be part of the United States. The US Virgin Islands were purchased from Denmark in 1918 after World War I as a location to provide strategic military support to protect the shipping lanes through the Caribbean and the Panama Canal.

Westward Settlement Patterns and European Immigration

The thirteen original colonies are often grouped into three regions, each with its own economic and cultural patterns. These three areas—New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the South—are considered culture hearths, or places where culture formed and from which it spread. The three regions were source areas for westward migration, and migrants from these regions carried with them the cultural traditions of their culture hearths. New England was characterized by poor soils, subsistence agriculture, and fishing communities and was the birthplace of North America's Industrial Revolution. Its largest city was Boston. Settlers from New England traveled west across New York State and into the upper Midwest and the Great Lakes region. The Mid-Atlantic region, focused on Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was known for its fertile soils, prosperous small-scale agriculture, and multinational population. Prosperous farming led to a vibrant economy and a robust network of towns and cities. People who wanted to migrate west from this region traveled down the **Great Valley** into the **Appalachian Mountains** and across the **Cumberland Gap** into Kentucky, or they crossed Pennsylvania and traveled west via the Ohio River valley. The heart of the South was Virginia, a region oriented around plantation agriculture. The South was overwhelmingly rural, and in time the bulk of its agricultural workforce consisted of slaves brought to the United States from Subsaharan Africa.

Westward migration was spurred along by the gold boom in California (1849) and by the completion of the transcontinental railroad (1869). The settlement frontier pushed westward during the course of the nineteenth century and was declared “closed” by the Bureau of the Census in 1890. This did not mean that settlers were spread uniformly across the continent by 1890; indeed, vast areas of the Great Plains and the mountain west remained sparsely populated

by Europeans at that time. The Homestead Act of 1862 also encouraged westward migration by offering 160 acres of free land to households willing to move west. The continental United States had been organized into official states by the end of the nineteenth century, except Oklahoma (1907), Arizona (1912), and New Mexico (1912).

Figure 4.6 The Holy Trinity Serb Orthodox Church in Butte, Montana



This church gives testimony to the impact that European immigration has had on the North American continent and the freedom of religion that the US Constitution provides.

Most US residents at its founding in 1776 had roots in Great Britain, with large numbers from other northern and western European countries and many others from Africa (most of whom were slaves in the South). During the nineteenth century, migrants continued to immigrate to the United States as its economy grew, especially after the 1830s. Germans and Irish began arriving in large numbers, joining others from Britain and other countries, predominantly those in western Europe. As the century progressed, others from southern and eastern Europe, from countries such

as Italy, Russia, and Austria, became the most significant stream of immigrants to the United States. The new arrivals were different from the early British immigrants: they practiced Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Christianity (not Protestantism), they primarily moved to urban areas, and they found work in the new manufacturing sector growing rapidly in the Northeast and around the Great Lakes. Very few immigrants came from Latin America or Asia at that time.

Industrial Development and Urbanization

The **Industrial Revolution** that began in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century eventually moved across the Atlantic and took hold in the United States. Rapid industrial growth emerged in the nineteenth century and was focused in the northeastern United States around the Great Lakes in an area called the Manufacturing Belt ([Figure 4.7 "Manufacturing Belt Turned Rust Belt"](#)). Mechanized manufacturing began with textiles (New England), moved to steel and other metals (Pennsylvania and Indiana), and later was dominated by the manufacture of automobiles (Michigan). Of course, manufacturing would not have been possible without an abundant supply of power. Coal mining became an important industry in western Pennsylvania and in Appalachia.

Manufacturing took place in the cities and towns of the Manufacturing Belt. Not until the second half of the twentieth century did manufacturing move to rural areas; until then, it was almost entirely an urban activity. As the United States went through its Industrial Revolution, its population shifted from being almost entirely rural to being mostly urban. In 1790, only about 5 percent of the US population lived in urban areas; by 1920, about 50 percent lived in cities. As the rural to urban shift took place, the function and form of US cities also changed.

Figure 4.7 Manufacturing Belt Turned Rust Belt

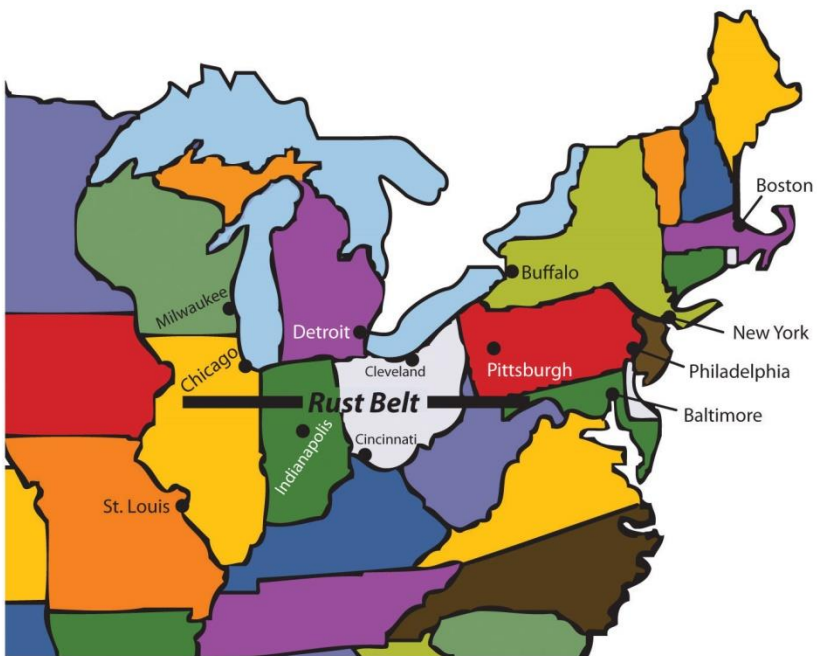


Table 4.1 US Population and Percentage Urban

Year	Percentage Urban	Population in Millions
1790	5.1	3.9
1810	7.3	7.2
1830	8.8	12.9
1850	15.4	23.2
1870	25.7	38.6
1890	35.1	63
1910	45.6	92.2
1930	56.1	123.2
1950	60	151.3
1970	73.6	203.3
1990	75.2	248.7
2010	82.0	308

From the colonial era until the late nineteenth century, US cities were walking cities. Because most Americans lived on farms, cities were small, compact, and centrally oriented: everything was located within walking distance. Only wealthy people had access to transportation by horse, and city dwellers needed to live within a short distance of where they worked, shopped, and carried out all their activities. The invention of the electric streetcar (1888) allowed cities to increase in size. People could live farther from their place of employment as long as they lived within walking distance of a streetcar line. Streetcar suburbs grew up along streetcar lines, and these neighborhoods were often segregated by ethnicity and race. Fewer people lived in downtowns, which became dedicated to retail and manufacturing. Cities remained oriented around a central business district (CBD), which was often located near the railway station. Factories needed to be near modes of transportation for both shipping in parts and shipping out completed products and so that workers could easily get to work.

Large numbers of middle class Americans began acquiring automobiles after about 1920; this eventually led to a complete rethinking of the spatial layout of the city. Automobile suburbs sprang up outside the traditional city limits as people were able to buy homes far from streetcar lines or railway stations. Cities became increasingly decentralized: people could go shopping in suburban malls instead of downtown department stores, factories could spring up at highway interchanges and not only near rivers and the railroad, and people could live in one suburb and work in another instead of living in the suburbs and working downtown. Neighborhoods became even more racially and economically segregated than they had in the past as middle-class whites moved into the new automobile suburbs and left the poorer African Americans behind in the cities.

By the late twentieth century, the automobile had led to a new urban form: the edge city. Edge cities are areas of dense urban development outside the boundaries of the traditional city. They often form at the intersection of major interstate highways and contain shopping malls, office complexes, high-rise apartment buildings, industrial parks, restaurants, and hotels. Sometimes edge cities are called **suburban downtowns**. Edge cities have supplanted the CBD as the destination of choice for Americans, whether they are heading to work or to play.

Economic Changes

For the purpose of understanding economic geography, all economic activities can be grouped into one of four categories, each with its respective terms, depending on the nature of what is being produced:

1. Primary economic sector activities include everything that pertains to the collection of raw materials, such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining—in other words, growing and extracting activities.
2. Secondary economic sector activities involve the processing of those raw materials through manufacturing, which has been the mainstay of economic growth for most developed countries.
3. Tertiary economic sector activities are those that produce services, not physical products.
4. Quaternary economic sector activities are those that deal with information collecting and processing, as well as management.

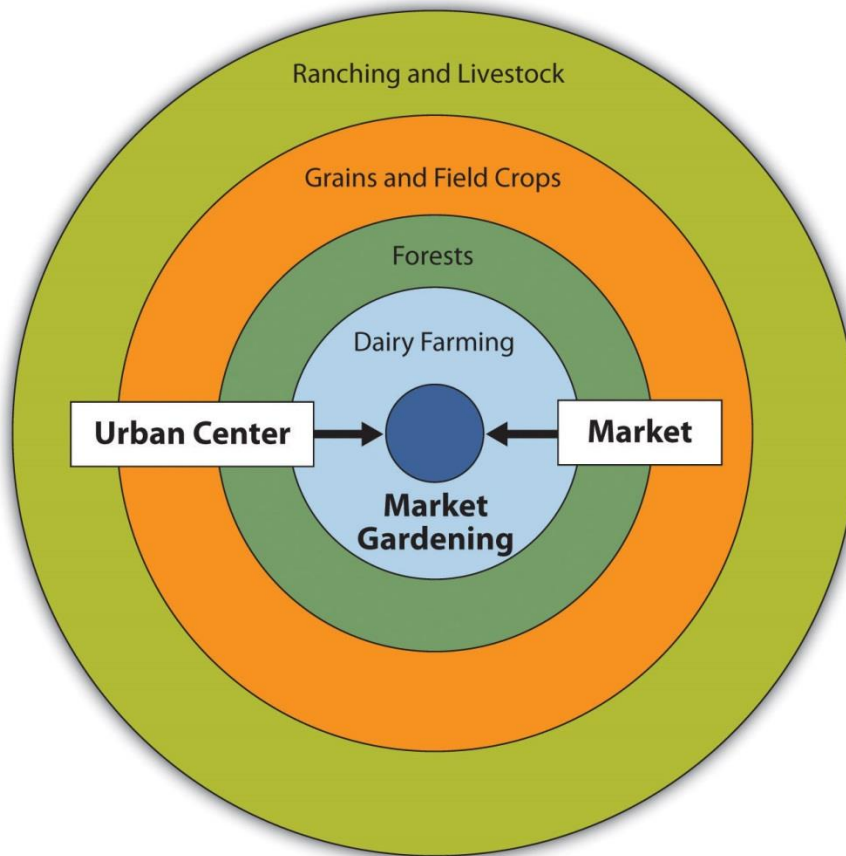
The tertiary and quaternary economic sectors are often thought of together as the **service sector**. In the explanation of how countries gain national income ([Section 1.4 "Globalization and Development"](#)), only primary and secondary activities produce actual physical products, and manufacturing traditionally earns the highest value-added profits. Tertiary activities are selective in gaining national wealth. For example, service activities such as tourism can bring in national wealth if the visitors are from outside the country. Tourism within a country can also influence economic conditions by increasing the amount of consumer spending.

During the colonial era and into the nineteenth century, when the majority of Americans lived on farms and worked in agriculture, most economic activity in the United States took place within the primary economic sector. Today, the primary sector is still an important component of the US economy, but far fewer people are employed in it. For example, less than 1 percent of Americans make their living by farming, but agricultural output has continued to grow because of advancements in mechanization and the development of high-tech seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. The United States has been able to export surplus agricultural output to other parts of

the world. Fewer people work in coal mines than in the past, but because of new mining technologies and methods such as mountaintop removal, coal production remains high.

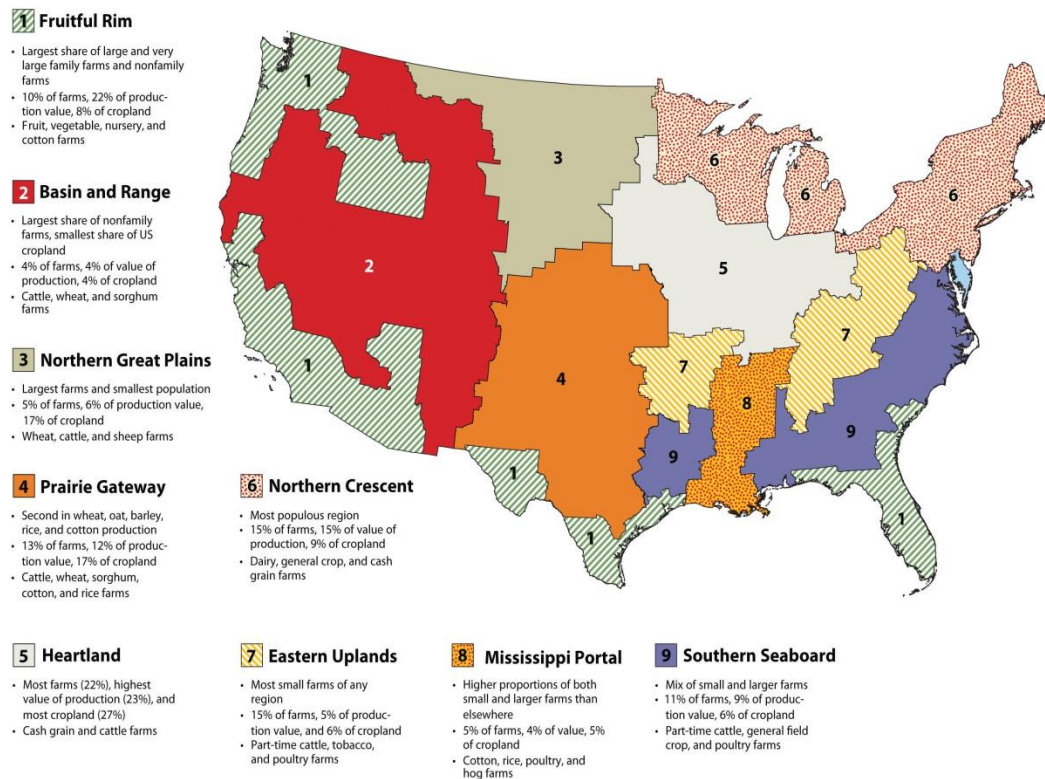
The geographic distribution of primary activities depends both on the location of natural features such as physical geography and climate and on the location of the market for a particular crop or resource. The nineteenth-century German economist Johann von Thünen created a model that predicted land use around a central market. In his theory, land closest to the market would be used to produce crops that were expensive to transport, such as dairy. Land far from the market would be used for the production of crops that were less expensive to transport and less perishable, such as grain. The von Thünen model predicts a series of concentric rings surrounding a central market, with each ring producing a different kind of crop. If the von Thünen model is applied at a much larger scale to the United States as a whole, with the densely populated urban zone from Boston to Washington, DC (called a **megalopolis**), used as the central market, the model does a fairly good job predicting the United States' agricultural land use. Dairy farms are found close to the market, grain farms are farther away, and ranch lands used for livestock production are even farther away.

Figure 4.8 The von Thünen Model



The von Thünen model as it relates to the development west of the East Coast megalopolis. For example, New Jersey is called the Garden State, Appalachia has its forests, the Midwest has its agricultural production, and the Great Plains has its large cattle ranching operations. This model was more applicable in past centuries for local communities when modern transportation technology was not available.

Figure 4.9 Farm Resource Regions



Anything that involves the processing of raw materials—manufacturing—is a secondary activity. As the United States moved into the Industrial Revolution and into the mid-twentieth century, the percentage of the US workforce involved in manufacturing grew from almost nothing until it peaked in the late 1970s. It was the main area of economic growth for decades. Although manufacturing was present in most areas of the country, it was focused in the northeastern United States and along the Great Lakes. Factories were close both to the reserves of labor and to the markets for manufactured products found in the densely populated Northeast. The steel industry was located in Pittsburgh and its environs because of the area’s access to iron ore (mined in Minnesota and transported via the Great Lakes) and to coal (mined in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and other parts of Appalachia).

As manufacturing has grown in other parts of the world, the secondary economic sector has declined in the United States. US labor statistics indicate that the United States lost about five

million manufacturing jobs between 2000 and 2010. Many of these jobs were lost to countries with lower labor costs, such as Mexico or China.

The third group of economic activities takes place in the tertiary and quaternary sectors, commonly known as the **service sector**. Tertiary and quaternary activities create services, not physical products. Service jobs include everything from engineering to finance, restaurants to sports, and childcare to medicine. The tertiary sector makes up more than three quarters of the US economy, as measured by its share of the **gross domestic product (GDP)**, which is the total value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given year. The GDP is then divided by the country's population to provide a GDP per capita statistic. The 2010 estimated **GDP** composition by sector for the United States is shown in [Table 4.2 "US GDP by Sector \(2010 Data\)"](#).

Table 4.2 US GDP by Sector (2010 Data)

Economic Sector	GDP (%)
Agriculture	1.2
Industry and mining	22.2
Services	76.7

These figures show that the United States has shifted to a postindustrial service economy. The rise of the **information age** in the latter part of the twentieth century shifted the workforce into the information sector. By the start of the twenty-first century, less than 2 percent of the US workforce was employed in agriculture, 15 percent in industry, and the rest in services (18 percent) and information activities (65 percent).

The locations of service-sector jobs are much more flexible than are jobs in the primary or secondary sectors. They are called footloose jobs: an accountant can live in New York or in Denver, whereas it is much more difficult for factories to move from one place to another and it is impossible for farms to relocate. Many of the information-technology jobs are emerging in the southern regions of the United States called the Sun Belt. Southern cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, and Phoenix are centers of innovation and population growth. The warmer climate, combined with a lower cost of living and less congestion, makes the Sun Belt an attractive location for

emerging information-based companies. Note that the popularity of the South and West for service-sector jobs only came about after the invention and adoption of air-conditioning. Air-conditioning was not widespread until after the Second World War in the 1950s.

While the population of the Southern states has increased, the population of some Northern states has decreased. The Sun Belt has always been a destination for people escaping the harsh winters of the Northern states. This has usually been only a seasonal transition. However, the new trend is one of permanent growth because of the increase in information technologies and in the service industry. Emerging companies looking to establish their businesses have targeted major cities from the Carolinas to the Southwest.

Migration Patterns

The United States has not only undergone a massive rural-to-urban shift in its population; intermigration within the United States from one region to another has also been prevalent. Each of the US regions has witnessed changes in demographics because of migration patterns.

In the agricultural regions of the United States, such as the **Midwest**, the migration pattern has been caused by changes in farm technology. Portions of the United States were opened up for agriculture because of the Homestead Act of 1862, where each person could receive 160 acres from the government to start a farm. They could keep the acres if they lived on them and farmed them for a period of years. In the 1800s, 160 acres was enough land to support a family if conditions were appropriate. The Industrial Revolution brought about improved farm equipment and technology. Larger and more expensive tractors and improved farming methods pushed the small farmers to sell out. Farms increased in size and fewer people were required to operate them. Since fewer farm workers are needed in rural areas, there has been a major rural-to-urban shift in the population. Central cities are increasing in population, while small towns and rural areas in the Midwest and across the nation are decreasing in population.

Americanism and Globalization

The freedom of personal expression in the United States has supported individual ingenuity and creative ambition to create the largest economy in the world. US citizens have pushed American

corporations to become a major force in the world markets. Products and franchises from the United States are being distributed throughout the world. Items such as fast food, computers, news networks, and Hollywood movies have become the products of choice in countries across the globe. The English language dominates the Internet, which has been heavily influenced by US corporations. The power of the American Dream—the idea that through hard work anyone can achieve upward mobility and financial success—as it is portrayed in the US media holds sway in the minds of people both in the United States and abroad.

Figure 4.10 US Corporate McDonald's Franchise in Israel



US news networks, such as CNN, are so dominant that small countries, having no resources to create networks, rely on the US networks to deliver their world news. US fast food franchises, of which McDonald's is the largest, exist in over one hundred countries. Despite humble beginnings in Arkansas, Walmart grew to become the world's largest corporation. It has become the buyer and seller of retail trade that shapes and molds cultural attitudes and fashions internationally.

The size of the US population (more than 310 million strong as of 2010) and the country's vast resource base have allowed it to become a world military superpower. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States became the most powerful military force in the world. The United States has also dominated the world's economy and its communications networks. The advancements of multinational corporations have in essence enabled the sale of America to the rest of the world. The selling of American products and the large consumer market in the United States have provided the profits that have fueled global economic markets.

The United States has become a worldwide franchise of its own. Corporate colonialism has advanced the American brand to a level that is now synonymous with consumerism, success, and power worldwide. Media advancements have promoted the concept of the American Dream across the seven seas. The reaction of the global community includes both admiration and disdain. Many view Americanism as interchangeable with globalization. Some welcome it; others reject it. The country of Iran is an example of this dichotomy. Young people in Iran wearing blue jeans gather in secret to watch American television programming from a hidden illegal satellite dish, while at the same time the anti-American forces in their government condemn America as decadent, immoral, and imperialistic.

Corporate colonialism has become a dominant force impacting the global cultural fabric. Supporters appreciate access to American goods and services, while opponents claim that the English language and the American corporate franchise system are destroying the culture and heritage of untold millions who see their unique traditional ways of life being overshadowed and destroyed.

Figure 4.11



Walmart is one of the greatest success stories of the American Dream. It started in Arkansas with one store and grew to become the largest corporation in the world. Now it is one of the most aggressive forces of corporate colonialism across the globe.

Many people worry about the future of the American Dream. American culture continues to evolve as people face changing economic and social conditions. Over the course of their history, Americans have faced both difficult and prosperous times, and now the future of this vibrant country is in the hands of the current generation. The United States has developed into one of the most powerful countries on the planet. Will the American Dream continue to motivate people in the future? Only time will tell.

Key Takeaways

- The United States' territory expanded gradually through various treaties and land acquisitions and was influenced by the concept of Manifest Destiny.
- The three main colonial regions in the United States—New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the South—had their own distinct economic foundations, settlement patterns, and social structures. People from these regions moved westward in particular migration patterns.

- In the beginning of the nineteenth century, most immigrants were from western and northern Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants were coming in large numbers from southern and Eastern Europe and moving to industrial cities of the Northeast.
- City structure changed from the walking cities of colonial America, to the railroad and streetcar cities of the late nineteenth century, to the automobile cities of the mid- and late-twentieth century.
- The US economy was initially based in the primary economic sector (particularly farming), then was based in the secondary economic sector (manufacturing), and is now oriented around the tertiary and quaternary economic sectors (services and information).
- The diverse immigrants who have created American society have been unified by common aspirations and common ideals that created the concept of the American Dream. The concept indicates that regardless of one's station in life, by working hard, applying oneself, and following the rules, one can obtain upward economic mobility.

4.3 United States: Population and Religion

Figure 4.12



The Statue of Liberty has long been a symbol of the American ideals that welcome immigrants to America..

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the concepts of the cultural melting pot and the American Dream and how they have contributed to American society and culture.
2. Describe the current demographic profile of the United States.
3. Identify the size, distribution, and other characteristics of the Hispanic population in the United States.

4. Explain the two most significant processes that led to the spatial distribution of African Americans in the United States.
5. Describe the distribution of the dominant religious affiliations in the United States.

The American “Melting Pot”

Early immigration to America was dominated by people from the British Isles, resulting in an American population for whom speaking English and practicing Protestant Christianity was the norm. There were some regional exceptions to this, such as Catholicism in Maryland and the widespread speaking of German in Pennsylvania, but by and large English and Protestantism were standard in the American colonies. As migrants arrived in the United States from non-English-speaking countries, within a generation they learned English and assimilated into American society, giving rise to the idea of the United States as a cultural melting pot. People were drawn to the United States by the hope of economic opportunities; most immigrants were poor and came to the United States to make a living and improve their financial well-being. They viewed assimilation into mainstream society as a necessity for success. They believed in the American Dream—that through hard work, you could achieve upward mobility and financial success no matter your background. The dream came true for millions of Americans but remains out of reach for many who live in poverty.

As of 2010, the United States was home to approximately 310 million people and was the third-most populated country in the world after China and India. Among developed countries, the US population is one of the fastest growing, at about 1 percent each year. This is thanks to a fertility rate of about 2.1 that is higher than the 1.5 for that of most European countries, as well as a positive net migration rate (more people immigrating to the United States than emigrating from it). In terms of human well-being, life expectancy is more than seventy-eight years for men, and the average woman can expect to live more than eighty years. While this may seem high, especially when compared with a century ago, life expectancy in the United States is lower than in forty-nine other countries.

Although English has remained the dominant language, as a country of immigrants, the United States is home to people from all corners of the world and home to many cultural or ethnic

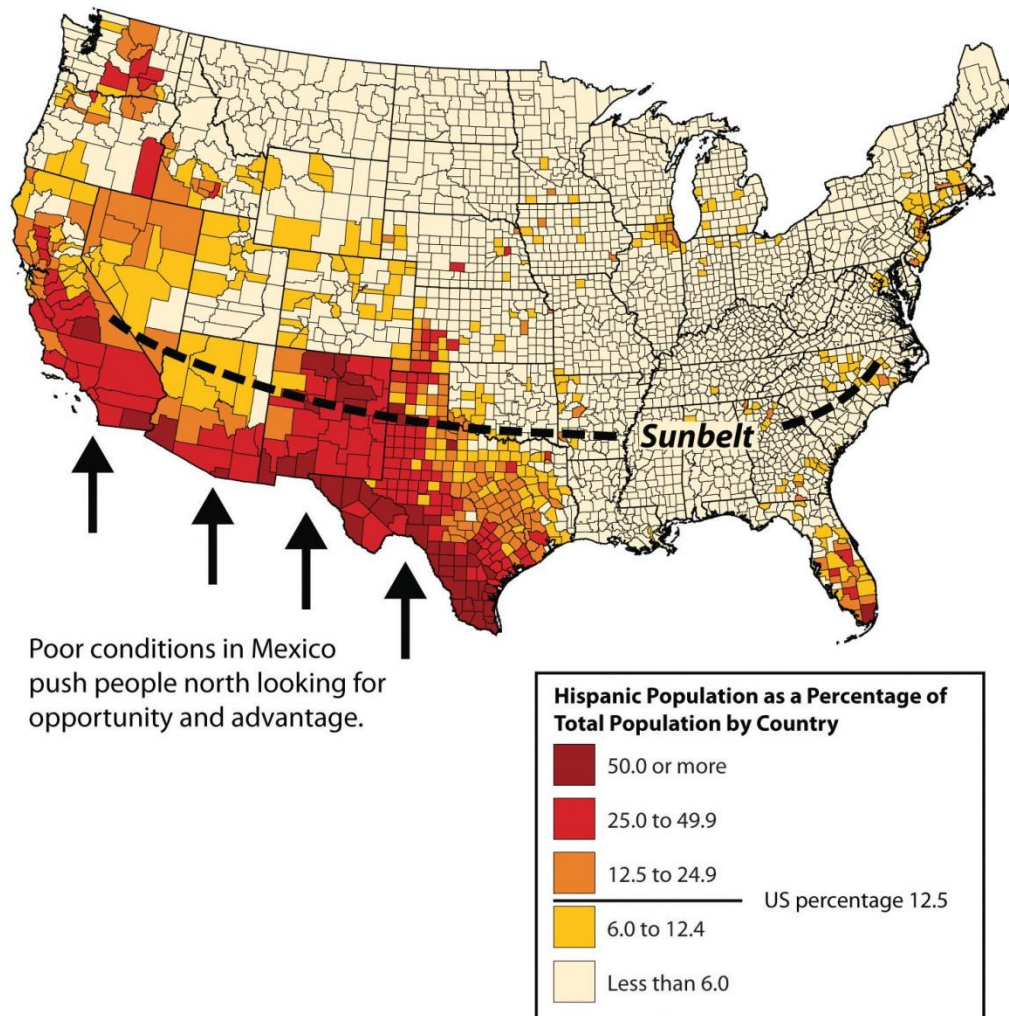
minority groups. According to the 2010 census, the ethnic minority groups in the United States included 16.3 percent Hispanic (who can be of any race); 12.6 percent black or African American; 5.0 percent Asian and Pacific Islander; and 1.0 percent Native American (American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts). An interesting trend is that Asians are growing faster than any other ethnic group in California, the nation's largest state. The 2010 census reported that the Asian population in California had increased 31.5 percent since 2000 to a total of five million.

The US Hispanic Population

One of the most striking shifts in immigration patterns of the past few decades has been the dramatic increase in Hispanic/Latino immigrants to the United States. While there have long been Spanish speakers living in the United States (recall that Spain colonized Florida, Texas, and the Southwest before those regions became part of the United States), for most of American history the Hispanic minority had little impact outside of a few areas of the country. In 1970, Hispanics made up less than 5 percent of the US population, but by 2010, forty-eight million Hispanics made up about 16 percent of the population ([Figure 4.13 "Hispanic Population in the United States and the US Sun Belt"](#)). For the first time, Hispanics were the largest ethnic minority in the United States, surpassing blacks as the largest minority starting with the 2000 US census (12.5 percent Hispanic compared with 12.3 percent black). The US Hispanic population doubled between the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Between 2000 and 2006, Hispanic population growth accounted for about half the nation's growth and grew about four times faster than the country's population as a whole.

The growth of the US Hispanic population is a direct result of increased immigration from Latin America to the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the Hispanic population having higher fertility rates than the non-Hispanic US population.

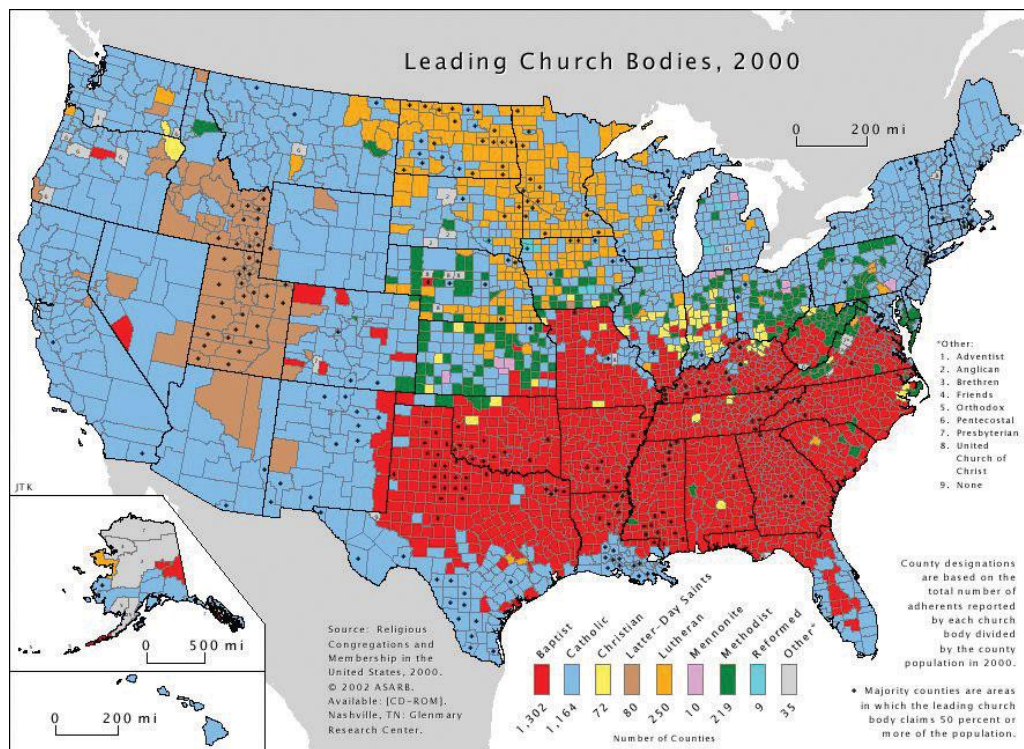
Figure 4.13 Hispanic Population in the United States and the US Sun Belt



Nearly half the Hispanics in the United States live in California or Texas, although there has been a large increase in the Hispanic population outside those states in the past decade, especially in the South. For example, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, and North and South Carolina all experienced Hispanic population growth rates between 55 and 61 percent from 2000 to 2006. All regions of the country saw double-digit growth rates of their Hispanic populations during that time. In places such as California, the large Hispanic population has an especially significant impact on the economy, politics, and every aspect of social life: more than one-third

of Californians are Hispanic (37 percent), while 42 percent are non-Hispanic white, and a much smaller minority are African American (7 percent).

Who are the Hispanics living in the United States? Most were born in the United States (60 percent), while the rest are immigrants. Two thirds are either from Mexico or of Mexican descent, while others hail from the US territory of Puerto Rico, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic. Note that all Puerto Ricans are US citizens and can move to and from the US mainland without any special documentation requirements. More Hispanics come from Central America than from South America. Hispanics work in all professions but are found in professions such as agriculture, construction, and food service at higher rates than the country's non-Hispanic population.



The most striking feature of the map is the block of red in the Southeast in which Baptist churches are the leading church body. Although Baptist churches are the leading religious body in about 45 percent of all counties in the United States, most of those counties are found in the

South. This region is considered the nation's Bible Belt, and it is a region in which churches are more likely than in other parts of the country to teach a literal interpretation of the Bible. Baptist churches grew in popularity in the South after the Civil War as more liturgical denominations such as Methodists went into decline, and Baptist churches are popular among both African American and white residents.

Figure 4.19



Dehart's Bible and Tire is located in the peripheral region of eastern Kentucky in the Bible Belt. Customers get a free Bible with every set of new tires.

Another interesting Protestant region is northern Appalachia and the lower Midwest from Ohio to Iowa and Kansas. As seen on the map, some of these counties are Baptist, in some of them the strongest church presence is Methodist, and in others it is Christian churches (Disciples of Christ and historically similar denominations) that prevail. The Methodist and other Christian areas were heavily influenced by the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century, which promoted the theology that every person could be saved through revivals. The movement provided for strong showings of Protestant denominations that arose during that time. The third Protestant region is the northern Midwest and Great Plains: Minnesota, the Dakotas, and surrounding areas. This was the destination of German and Scandinavian Lutheran settlers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the leading denominations today in much of that area remain Lutheran.

The Roman Catholic Church, which is the leading religious body in 40 percent of US counties, is well represented in the Northeast, West, and Southwest. In the Northeast and Midwest, the Catholic dominance points to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigration from Roman Catholic countries in Europe such as Italy, Ireland, and Poland. Those earlier Catholics have been joined more recently by large numbers of Hispanic immigrants. The dominance of Roman Catholics in the western United States, the Southwest, and even Florida in the Southeast are a reflection of the strong Hispanic presence in those parts of the country.

In the western United States, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon church or LDS) dominates a region including Utah and surrounding states. Utah was the destination of Mormon members as they migrated westward during the mid-nineteenth century.

Major urban centers are home to people who follow all the major religions of the world. Muslim populations are found in cities as a result of late twentieth century immigrants arriving from countries such as India, Pakistan, and places in the Middle East and moving to urban areas for employment. Detroit and its surrounding counties in southeastern Michigan are one part of the country with a high concentration of Muslim immigrants.

2.Discuss The Many Geographical Assets Of Middle America (Both Physical And Human).

Middle America



Introduction

Middle America, the geographic realm between the United States and the continent of South America, consists of three main regions: the Caribbean, Mexico, and the Central American republics. The **Caribbean** region, the most culturally diverse of the three, consists of more than seven thousand islands that stretch from the Bahamas to Barbados. The four largest islands of the Caribbean make up the Greater Antilles, which include Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico. Hispaniola is split between Haiti in the west and the Dominican Republic in the east. The smaller islands, extending all the way to South America, make up the Lesser Antilles. The island that is farthest south is Trinidad, just off the coast of Venezuela. The Bahamas, the closest islands to the US mainland, are located in the Atlantic Ocean but are associated with the Caribbean region. The Caribbean region is surrounded by bodies of salt water: the Caribbean Sea in the center, the Gulf of Mexico to the west, and the North Atlantic to the east.

Central America refers to the seven states south of Mexico: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Panama borders the South American country of

Colombia. During the colonial era, Panama was included in the part of South America controlled by the Spanish. The Pacific Ocean borders Central America to the west, and the Caribbean Sea borders these countries to the east. While most of the republics have both a Caribbean and a Pacific coastline, Belize has only a Caribbean coast, and El Salvador has only a Pacific coast.

Mexico, the largest country in Middle America, is often studied separately from the Caribbean or Central America. Mexico has an extensive land border with the United States, its neighbor to the north. The Baja Peninsula, the first of Mexico's two noted peninsulas, borders California and the Pacific Ocean and extends southward from California for 775 miles. The **Baja region** is mainly a sparsely populated desert area. The **Yucatán Peninsula** borders Guatemala and Belize and extends north into the Gulf of Mexico. The Yucatán was a part of the ancient Mayan civilization and is still home to many Maya people.

Middle America is not a unified realm but is characterized by a high level of political and cultural diversity. A diverse mix of people—with **Amerindian** (people native to the Americas), African, European, and Asian ethnic backgrounds—make up the cultural framework. This realm is often associated with the term “Latin America” because of the dominance of colonialism from European countries such as Spain, France, and Portugal, where the people speak a Latin-based language. The truth is that Latin is not an active language, and Middle America has created its own cultural identity in spite of the impact of colonialism, and the realm can be defined by its people and their activities as much as by its physical environment.

CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Figure 1.

Middle America: Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America. Central America includes the countries south of Mexico through Panama.

7.1 Introducing the Realm

Learning Objectives

1. Define the differences between the rimland and the mainland.
2. Summarize the impact of European colonialism on Middle America.
3. Distinguish between the Mayan and Aztec Empires and identify which the Spanish defeated.
4. Describe how the Spanish influenced urban development.

A. Physical Geography

Middle America has various types of physical landscapes, including volcanic islands and mountain ranges. Tectonic action at the edge of the **Caribbean Plate** has brought about volcanic

activity, creating many of the islands of the region as volcanoes rose above the ocean surface. The island of Montserrat is one such example. The volcano on this island has continued to erupt in recent years, showering the island with dust and ash and making habitation difficult. Many of the other low-lying islands, such as the Bahamas, were formed by coral reefs rising above the ocean surface. Tectonic plate activity not only has created volcanic islands but also is a constant source of earthquakes that continue to be a problem for the Caribbean community.

The republics of Central America extend from Mexico to Colombia and form the final connection between North America and South America. The **Isthmus of Panama**, the narrowest point between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, serves as a **land bridge** between the continents. The backbone of Central America is mountainous, with many volcanoes located within its ranges. Much of the Caribbean and all of Central America are located south of the Tropic of Cancer and are dominated by tropical type A climates. The mountainous areas have varied climates, with cooler climates located at higher elevations. Mexico has extensive mountainous areas with two main ranges in the north and highlands in the south. There are no landlocked countries in this realm, and coastal areas have been exploited for fishing and tourism development.

B. Rimland and Mainland

Using a regional approach to the geography of a realm helps us compare and contrast a place's features and characteristics. Location and the physical differences explain the division of Middle America into two geographic areas according to occupational activities and colonial dynamics: the **rimland**, which includes the Caribbean islands and the Caribbean coastal areas of Central America, and the **mainland**, which includes the interior of Mexico and Central America.

Colonialism thrived in the rimland because it consists mainly of islands and coastal areas that were accessible to European ships. Ships could easily sail into a cove or bay to make port and claim the island for their home country. After an island or coastal area was claimed, there was unimpeded transformation of the area through **plantation agriculture**. On a plantation, local individuals were subjugated as servants or slaves. The land was planted with a single crop—usually sugarcane, tobacco, cotton, or fruit—grown for export profits. Most of these crops were

not native to the Americas but were brought in during colonial times. European diseases killed vast numbers of local Amerindian laborers, so slaves were brought from Africa to do the work. Plantation agriculture in the rimland was successful because of the import of technology, slave labor, and raw materials, as well as the export of the harvest to Europe for profit.

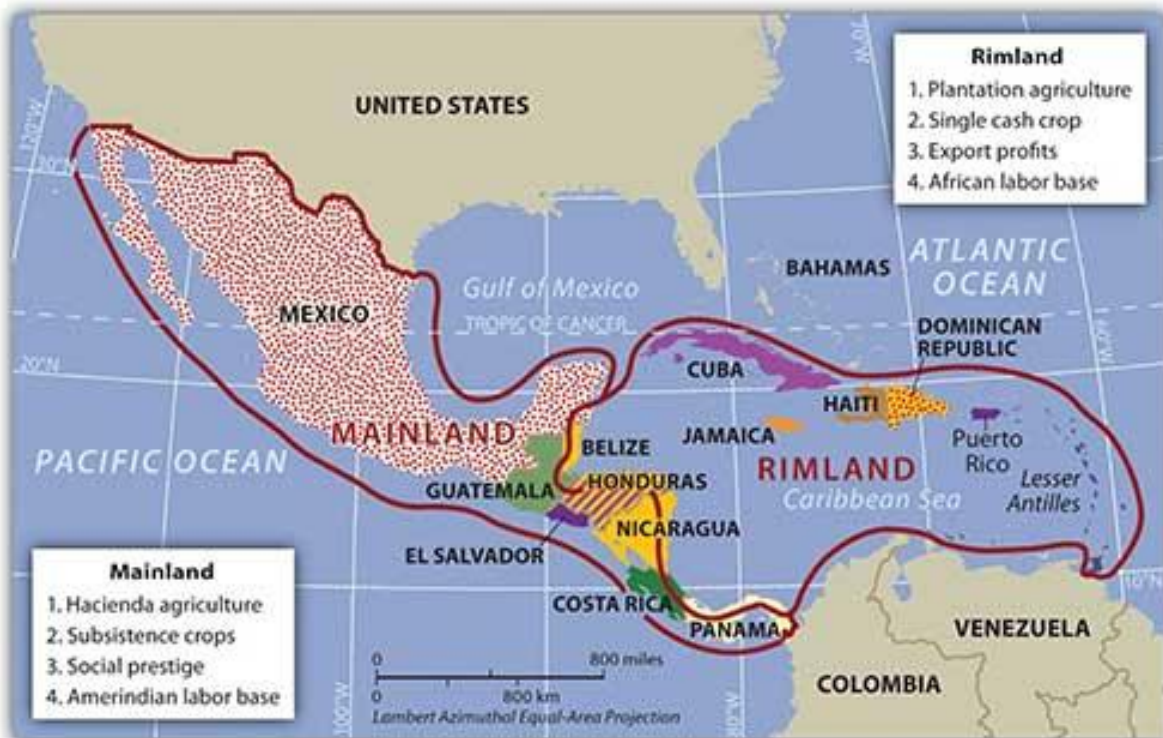


Figure 2. Mainland and Rimland Characteristics of Middle America Based on Colonial-Era Economic Activities. The rimland was more accessible to European ships, and the mainland was more isolated from European activity.

Plantation agriculture changed the rimland. The local groups were diminished because of disease and colonial subjugation, and by the 1800s most of the population was of African descent. Native food crops for consumption gave way to **cash crops** for export. **Marginal lands** were plowed up and placed into the plantation system. The labor was usually seasonal: there was a high demand for labor at peak planting and harvest times. Plantations were generally owned by wealthy Europeans who may or may not have actually lived there.

The mainland, consisting of Mexico and the interior of Central America, diverged from the rimland in terms of both colonial dynamics and agricultural production. The interior lacked the easy access to the sea that the rimland enjoyed. As a result, the **hacienda** style of land use developed. This Spanish innovation was aimed at land acquisition for social prestige and a comfortable lifestyle. Export profits were not the driving force behind the operation, though they may have existed. The indigenous workers, who were poorly paid if at all, were allowed to live on the haciendas, working their own plots for subsistence. African slaves were not prominent in the mainland.

In the mainland, European colonialists would enter an area and stake claims to large portions of the land, often as much as thousands or even in the millions of acres. Haciendas would eventually become the main landholding structure in the mainland of Mexico and many other regions of Middle America. In the hacienda system, the Amerindian people lost ownership of the land to the European colonial masters. Land ownership or the control of land has been a common point of conflict throughout the Americas where land transferred from a local indigenous ownership to a colonial European ownership.

The plantation and hacienda eras are in the past. The abolition of slavery in the later 1800s and the cultural revolutions that occurred on the mainland challenged the plantation and hacienda systems and brought about land reform. Plantations were transformed into either multiple private plots or large corporate farms. The hacienda system was broken up, and most of the hacienda land was given back to the people, often in the form of an **ejidos system**, in which the community owns the land but individuals can profit from it by sharing its resources. The ejidos system has created its own set of problems, and many of the communally owned lands are being transferred to private owners.

The agricultural systems changed Middle America by altering both the systems of land use and the ethnicity of the population. The Caribbean Basin changed in ethnicity from being entirely Amerindian, to being dominated by European colonizers, to having an African majority population. The mainland experienced the mixing of European culture with the Amerindian culture to form various types of **mestizo** groups with Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano identities.

C. The European Invasion

European colonialism had an immense effect on the rest of the world. Among other things, colonialism diffused European languages and the Christian religion. Consider how European colonialism altered language and religion in the Americas. The two main European countries to colonize Middle and South America were Spain and Portugal, which are predominantly Roman Catholic. Latin Mass has been a tradition in the Roman Catholic Church, and the Latin-based Romance languages of Spanish and Portuguese are now the most widely used languages in Middle and South America. This is where the term *Latin America* originated for this realm, and the name is still widely used. Today, however, *Middle America* is a more accurate term for the region between the United States and South America, and South America is the appropriate name for the southern continent, in spite of the connection to Latin-based languages.

European colonialism impacted Middle America in more ways than language and religion. Before Christopher Columbus arrived from Europe, the Americas did not have animals such as horses, donkeys, sheep, chickens, and domesticated cattle. This meant there were no large draft animals for plowing fields or carrying heavy burdens. The concept of the wheel, which was so prominent in Europe, was not found in use in the Americas. Food crops were also different: the potato was an American food crop, as were corn, squash, beans, chili peppers, and tobacco. Europeans brought other food crops—either from Europe itself or from its colonies—such as coffee, wheat, barley, rice, citrus fruits, and sugarcane. Besides food crops, building methods, agricultural practices, and even diseases were exchanged. Since it occurred after the arrival of Columbus in the late 15th century, this widespread transfer of plants, animals, diseases, and technology is referred to as the **Columbian Exchange**.

The Spanish invasion of Middle America following Columbus had some devastating consequences for the indigenous populations. It has been estimated that fifteen to twenty million people lived in Middle America when the Europeans arrived, but after a century of European colonialism, only about 2.5 million remained. Through warfare, disease, and enslavement, the local populations were decimated. Only a small number of people still claim Amerindian heritage in the Caribbean Basin, and some argue that these few are not

indigenous to the Caribbean but are descendants of slaves brought from South America by European colonialists.

D. The Maya and the Aztec

Though the region of Mexico has been inhabited for thousands of years, one of the earliest cultures to develop into a civilization with large cities was the **Olmec**, which was believed to be the precursor to the later **Mayan Empire**. The Olmec flourished in the south-central regions of Mexico from 1200 BCE to about 400 BCE. Anthropologists call this region of Mexico and northern Central America **Mesoamerica**. It is considered to be the region's cultural hearth because it was home to early human civilizations. The Maya established a vast civilization after the Olmec, and Mayan stone structures remain as major tourist attractions. The classical era of the Mayan civilization lasted from 300 to 900 CE and was centered in the Yucatán Peninsula region of Mexico, Belize, and Central America. Guatemala was once a large part of this vast empire, and Mayan ruins are found as far south as Honduras. During the classical era, the Maya built some of the most magnificent cities and stone pyramids in the Western Hemisphere. The city-states of the empire functioned through a sophisticated religious hierarchy. The Mayan civilization made advancements in mathematics, astronomy, engineering, and architecture. They developed an accurate calendar based on the seasons and the solar system. The extent of their immense knowledge is still being discovered. The descendants of the Maya people still exist today, but their empire does not.

The Toltec, who controlled central Mexico briefly, came to power after the classical Mayan era. They also took control of portions of the old Mayan Empire from the north. The **Aztec** federation replaced the Toltec and Maya as the dominant civilization in southern Mexico. The Aztec, who expanded outward from their base in central Mexico, built the largest and greatest city in the Americas of the time, **Tenochtitlán**, with an estimated population of one hundred thousand. Tenochtitlán was located at the present site of Mexico City, and it was from there the Aztec expanded into the south and east to create an expansive empire. The Aztec federation was a regional power that subjugated other groups and extracted taxes and tributes from them. Though they borrowed ideas and innovations from earlier groups such as the Maya, they made great

strides in agriculture and urban development. The Aztec rose to dominance in the fourteenth century and were still in power when the Europeans arrived.



Figure 3. Mayan Site of Uxmal in the Yucatán region of Mexico. The classical Mayan era lasted from 300 to 900 CE. Many magnificent cities were built with stone and remain today as major tourist attractions.

E. Spanish Conquest of 1519–21

After the voyages of Columbus, the Spanish conquistadors came to the New World in search of gold, riches, and profits, bringing their Roman Catholic religion with them. Zealous church members sought to convert the “heathens” to their religion. One such conquistador was **Hernán Cortés**, who, with his 508 soldiers, landed on the shores of the Yucatán in 1519. They made their way west toward the Aztec Empire. The wealth and power of the Aztecs attracted

conquistadors such as Cortés, whose goal was to conquer. Even with metal armor, steel swords, sixteen horses, and a few cannons, Cortés and his men did not challenge the Aztecs directly. The Aztec leader Montezuma II originally thought Cortés and his men were legendary “White Gods” returning to recover the empire. Cortés defeated the Aztecs by uniting the people that the Aztecs had subjugated and joining with them to fight the Aztecs. The Spanish conquest of the Aztec federation was complete by 1521.

F. The Spanish Colonial City

As the Spanish established urban centers in the New World, they structured each town after the Spanish pattern, with a **plaza** in the center. Around the plaza on one side was the church (Roman Catholic). On the other sides were government offices and stores. Residential homes filled in around them. This pattern can still be seen in almost all the cities built by the Spanish in Middle and South America. The Catholic Church not only was located in the center of town but also was a supreme cultural force shaping and molding the Amerindian societies conquered by the Spanish.

In Spain, the cultural norm was to develop urban centers wherever administration or military support was needed. Spanish colonizers followed a similar pattern in laying out the new urban centers in their colonies. Extending out from the city center (where the town plaza, government buildings, and church were located) was a commercial district that was the backbone of this model. Expanding out on each side of the spine was a wealthy residential district for the upper social classes, complete with office complexes, shopping districts, and upper-scale markets.

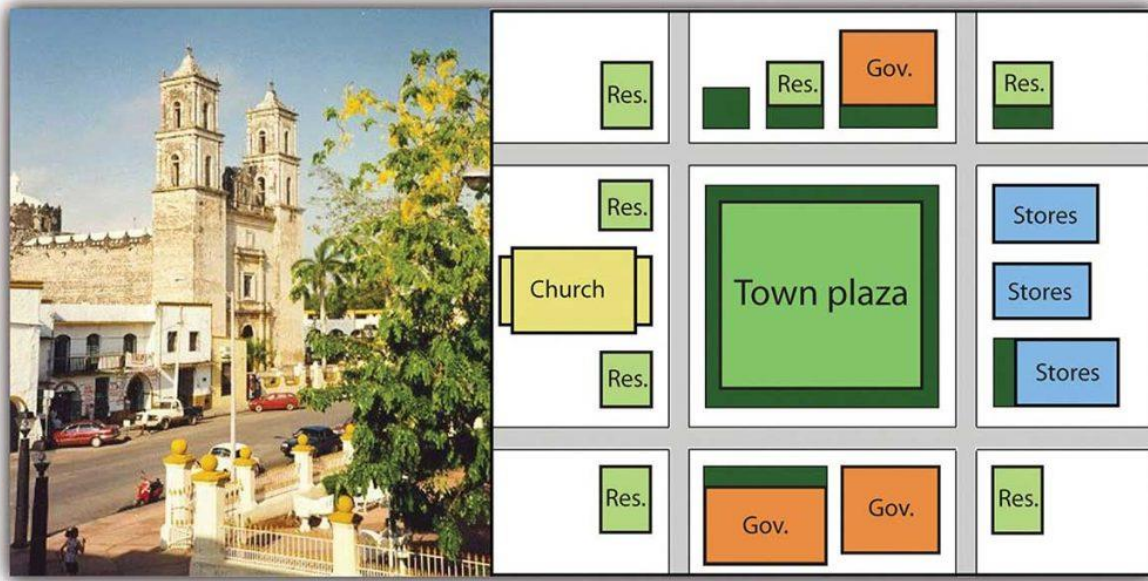


Figure 4. Catholic cathedral across from a plaza in the Yucatán City of Valladolid (left); Model of a Spanish colonial urban pattern (right). The Spanish colonial urban pattern had a plaza in the center of the city with government buildings around the square and a Catholic church on one side.

Surrounding the **central business district (CBD)** and the spine of most cities in Middle and South America are concentric zones of residential districts for the lower, working, and middle classes and the poor. The first zone, the **zone of maturity**, has well-established middle-class residential neighborhoods with city services. The second concentric zone, the **zone of transition (in situ accretion)**, has poorer working-class districts mixed with areas with makeshift housing and without city services. The outer zone, the **peripheral zone** (Spanish, **periférico**), is where the expansion of the city occurs, with makeshift housing and squatter settlements. This zone has little or no city services and functions on an informal economy. This outer zone often branches into the city, with slums known as **favelas** or **barrios** that provide the working poor access to the city without its benefits. Impoverished immigrants that arrive in the city from the rural areas often end up in the city's outer periphery to eke out a living in some of the worst living conditions in the world.

Cities in this Spanish model grow by having the outer ring progress to the point where eventually solid construction takes hold and city services are extended to accommodate the residents. When

this ring reaches maturity, a new ring of squatter settlements emerges to form a new outer ring of the city. The development dynamic is repeated, and the city continues to expand outward. The urban centers of Middle and South America are expanding at rapid rates. It is difficult to provide public services to the outer limits of many of the cities. The barrios or favelas become isolated communities, often complete with crime bosses and gang activities that replace municipal security.

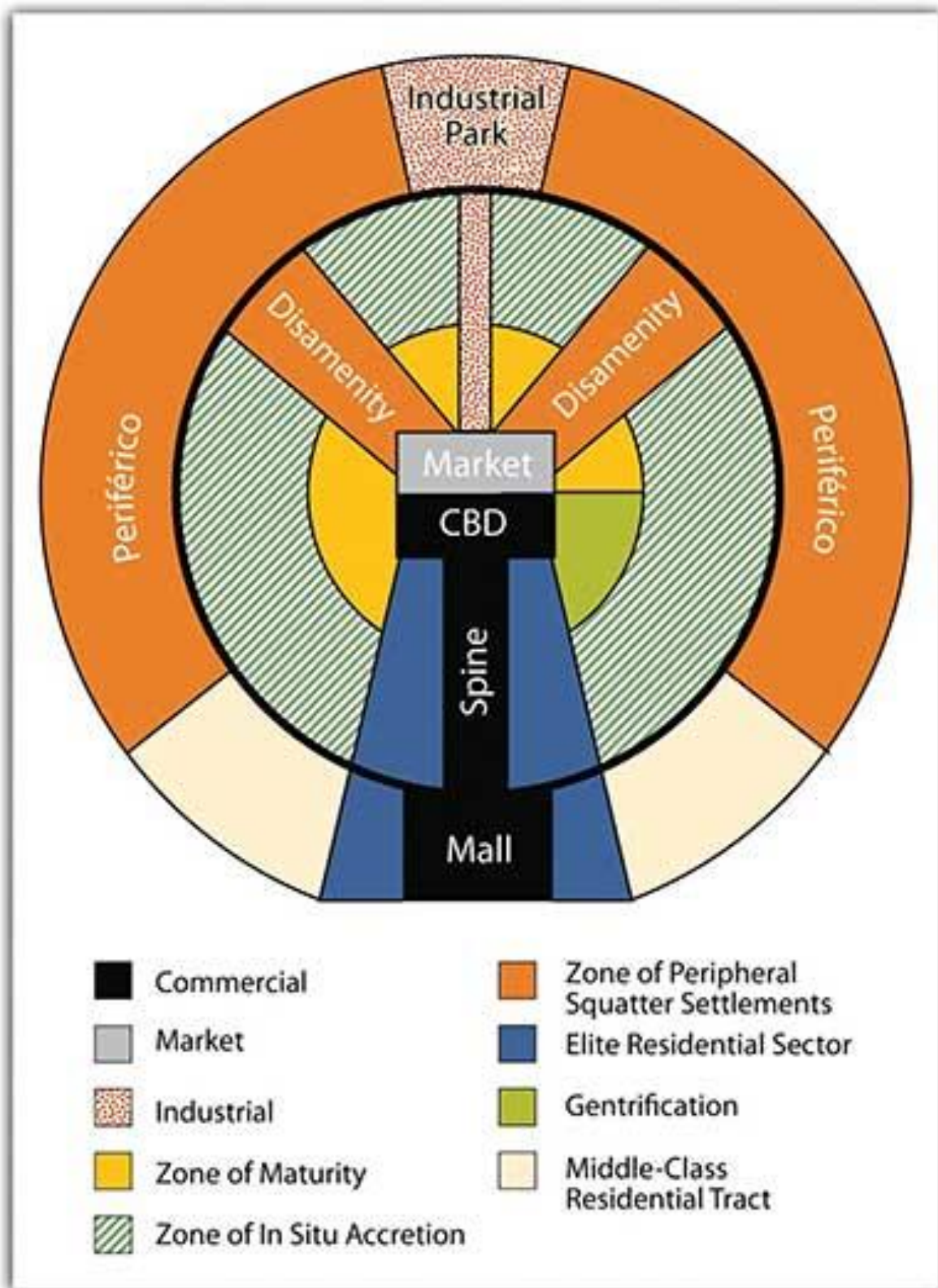


Figure 5. Spanish-American city structure according to the Ford-Griffin model.

Key Takeaways

1. Haciendas were located chiefly in the mainland and plantations were located mainly in the rimland.
2. Both the hacienda and the plantation structures of agriculture altered the ethnic makeup of their respective regions. The rimland had an African labor base, and the mainland had an Amerindian labor base.
3. In their quest for wealth, Spanish conquistadors destroyed the Aztec Empire and colonized the Middle American mainland. Much historical knowledge was lost with the demise of the learned class of the Aztec Empire.
4. Europeans introduced many new food crops and domesticated animals to the Americas and in turn brought newly discovered agricultural products from America back to Europe. This is known as the Columbian Exchange.
5. The Spanish introduced the same style of urban planning to the Americas that was common in Spain. Many cities in Middle and South America were patterned after Spanish models.

3. Discuss The Many Geographical Assets Of South America (Both Physical And Human).

South America



8.1 Introducing the Realm

Learning Objectives

1. Summarize the main physical features and characteristics of South America.
2. Explain how European colonialism dominated the realm and divided up the continent.
3. Describe the ethnic, economic, and political patterns in the Guianas.
4. Outline the main cultural realms of South America. Describe each realm's main majority and explain how colonialism impacted each region.
5. Summarize how the South American countries are attempting to integrate their economies.

Europeans called the Western Hemisphere the New World. South America is the realm consisting of the southern portion of the New World. This realm includes the entire continent of South America, which is smaller in physical area than North America. As a continent, South America is larger in physical area than Europe, Antarctica, or Australia but is smaller than Africa or Asia. Almost the entire landmass of South America lies to the east of the same meridian that runs through Miami, Florida. The Atlantic Ocean borders the continent to the east and the Pacific Ocean borders the continent on the west. The narrow Isthmus of Panama creates a natural break between the South American continent and its neighbors to the north. The Caribbean Sea creates the northern boundary.

South America covers an extensive range of latitude. The equator cuts through the northern part of the continent directly through the mouth of the mighty **Amazon River**. The country of Ecuador is located on the equator—hence its name. The equatorial region is dominated by the tropical climates of the immense Amazon Basin. The Tropic of Capricorn runs directly through the latitude of São Paulo, Brazil, and Chile's **Atacama Desert**, which reveals that most of the continent is in the zone of the tropics to the north. South of the Tropic of Capricorn is the Southern Cone of South America, home to the physical regions of the Pampas and Patagonia. Tierra del Fuego is the southern tip of the realm with territory in both Argentina and Chile. On the south side of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago is **Cape Horn**, which is the southernmost land point of the continent.

The continent of South America has a wide diversity of physical landscapes, from the high Andes Mountains to the tropical forests of the **Amazon Basin**. This assortment of physical features offers many resources, allowing people to engage in economic activity, gain wealth, and provide for their needs. **The Andes** hold mineral riches that have been extracted since ancient times. Precious metals have been mined from the mountains to grant great opportunities for those fortunate enough to be recipients of its wealth. Fossil fuels have been found in abundance in the far northern regions of Venezuela and Colombia. The **Amazon Basin** has been a source of hardwood lumber and, more recently, extensive mineral wealth. Some of the largest iron-ore mines in the world are located here. The massive plains of Brazil and the rich soils of the Pampas allow for enormous agricultural operations that provide food products for the continent and for the world. Even the inhospitable Atacama region in northern Chile holds some of the world's

largest copper reserves. In addition, the wide variety of climate zones allowed a diverse range of species to develop.

Before the era of European colonialism, many local groups organized themselves into states or empires. The Inca Empire was the largest in existence at the time the Europeans arrived.

European colonialism altered the continent in several ways. Not only did the Europeans defeat and conquer indigenous Amerindian groups such as the Inca, but cultural exchanges also took place that altered the way of life for countless South Americans. Colonialism created many of the current country borders and influenced trade relationships with the newly created colonies. The plantation system and the introduction of slaves from Africa drastically changed the ethnic makeup of the people living along the eastern coast. After slavery was abolished, indentured servitude brought workers from Asia to support the labor base.

Indentured servants were usually poor individuals who agreed to work for an agreed upon period of time, usually less than seven years, in return for the necessities of life such as lodging, food, and transportation or clothing. These individuals did not usually receive a salary but may have received a lump sum payment upon completion of the agreed upon service. Under favorable conditions indentured servants were treated like relatives and gained important experience and job skills to provide for their future. Many situations were much less favorable and resembled a form of slavery where individuals suffered from disease, harsh conditions, or even succumbed to death.

The continent can be divided into regions by ethnic majorities influenced by early colonial development. The mixing of ethnic groups from Europe, Africa, and Asia with each other or with the indigenous population has created a diverse cultural mosaic. For example, most people in Guyana and Suriname are from Asia, most people in Argentina and Uruguay are from Europe, most people in Peru and Bolivia are Amerindian, and most people in many areas along the eastern coast of Brazil are of African descent. A large percentage of the population of South America is of a mixed ethnic background.

South America's modern economic development has helped integrate it with the global economy. The levels of economic development vary widely within the realm. There are clear

indications of core-peripheral spatial patterns within various regions of the continent, and rural-to-urban shift has been strong in many areas. The rural regions in the Andes or the interior suffer from a lack of economic support needed to modernize their infrastructure. At the same time, metropolitan areas are expanding rapidly and are integrated with global markets and the latest technologies. Most of the large cities are located along the coastal regions. This pattern of urbanization is mainly a result of colonial activity and influence. The countries of South America are working among themselves to network trade and commerce activities. Trade agreements and economic unions have become standard methods of securing business partnerships to enhance the realm's economic opportunities.



Figure 1. South America: Political map of the countries and various physical regions. The main two physical features of South America are the Andes Mountains and the Amazon Basin

A. Physical Geography

The far-reaching Andes Mountains and the massive Amazon River system dominate South America's physical geography. The five-thousand-mile-long Andes Mountain chain extends along the entire western region of the continent from Venezuela to southern Chile. The Andes are the longest mountain chain on Earth and the highest in the Americas. The Andes Mountain

range has more than thirty peaks that reach at least twenty thousand feet in elevation, many of which are active volcanoes. The Andes has provided isolation to the Inca Empire, mineral wealth to those with the means for extraction, and a barrier to travelers crossing the continent. The Andes' minerals include gold, silver, tin, and other precious metals. Mining became a major industry in the colonial era and continues to the present.

At the core of the continent is the mighty Amazon River, which is more than 4,300 miles long and has an enormous drainage basin in the largest tropical rain forest in the world. The Amazon's many tributaries are larger than many other world rivers. The Amazon and its many tributaries drain the entire interior region of the continent, covering 40 percent of South America. The Amazon has the greatest discharge of any river in the world, carrying about one fifth of all river water on the planet, and is probably the longest river in the world (only the Nile River may be longer, depending on how the exact length is measured). During the rainy season, the Amazon River can be more than one hundred miles wide. No bridges span the Amazon River. Its source is a glacial stream located high in the Peruvian Andes, only about 150 miles from the Pacific Ocean.

The Amazon's extended tributaries—such as the **Rio Negro**, the **Madeira**, and the **Xingu**—move massive amounts of water through the Amazon Basin and are major rivers in their own right. The Amazon has more than 1,100 tributaries; a dozen are more than one thousand miles long. Hydroelectric dams are located on the tributaries to produce electricity for the region's fast-growing development. South America has additional large rivers that drain the continent, including the Orinoco, which flows through Venezuela; the Sao Francisco, which flows through southeast Brazil; and the **Paraguay** and the **Paraná** Rivers, which flow south from Brazil into the **Rio de la Plata** between Argentina and Uruguay.

The **Altiplano Region** is a wide basin between two main Andean mountain ranges. The word altiplano means “valley” in Spanish. There are a substantial number of altiplanos in South America. They provide for agricultural production and human habitation. Lake Titicaca rests in the middle of the Altiplano Region of the Central Andes on the border between Peru and Bolivia. Lake Titicaca is a large freshwater lake about 120 miles long and 50 miles wide. The surface is

at an elevation of about twelve thousand feet above sea level, and the lake is more than nine hundred feet deep in some areas. Usually at such high elevations, the temperature would dip below freezing and restrict agriculture. However, the large lake acts as a solar energy collector by absorbing energy from the sun during the day and giving off that energy in the form of heat during the night. The energy redistribution allows for a moderate temperature around the lake that is conducive to growing crops. With abundant fresh water and the ability to grow food and catch fish, the Altiplano Region has supported human habitation for thousands of years.

Across the Andes Mountains from the Altiplano Region is the Atacama Desert. The Atacama is one of the driest places on Earth: in some parts, no rain has fallen in recorded history. In normal circumstances, the Atacama would be a desolate region without human activity, but that is not the case. Some of the world's largest copper reserves are found here. Nitrates, which are used in fertilizers, are also found in large quantities. Mining the Atacama has brought enormous wealth to people fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of the profits. The rain shadow effect is responsible for the extraordinary dryness of the Atacama. The Andes are quite high at this latitude, and the winds blow in rain clouds from the east. When the clouds reach the mountains, they ascend in elevation, releasing their precipitation without ever reaching the western side of the Andes.



Figure 2. Lake Titicaca with traditional reed boat made by Amerindian locals. Lake Titicaca is the highest-elevation navigable lake in the world.

South America has large agricultural plateaus east of the Andes, such as the Mato Grosso Plateau, which includes a portion of the great **Cerrado** agricultural region of central Brazil. The Cerrado is a vast plain that has been developed for agriculture and produces enormous harvests of soybeans and grain crops. Bordering the **Cerrado** to the southeast are the **Brazilian Highlands**, an extensive coffee-growing region. **The Pampas** in eastern Argentina, Uruguay, and southernmost Brazil is another excellent agricultural region with good soils and adequate rainfall. Farming, cattle ranching, and even vineyards can be found here, making the Pampas the breadbasket of the Southern Cone. To the south of the Pampas is the lengthy expanse of **Patagonia**, which covers the southern portion of Argentina east of the Andes. Patagonia is a prairie grassland region that does not receive much rainfall because of the rain shadow effect of the Andes to the west. The main activities in Patagonia are the raising of cattle and other

livestock. The region is starting to attract attention for the extraction of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and valuable minerals.

To the northern part of the continent in Venezuela and Colombia, sandwiched between the Andes Mountains and the **Guiana Highlands**, is a grassland region with scrub forests called the Llanos. The human population is small because of the remoteness of the region along the Orinoco River basin. The Guiana Highlands of southeast Venezuela and the Guianas are an isolated set of mountainous plateaus mixed with rugged landscapes and tropical climates. Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world, with a free fall of more than 2,647 feet and a total drop of about 3,212 feet (more than half a mile), is located here. To the northwest of the **Llanos** and the Guiana Highlands in Venezuela is Lake Maracaibo, a large inland lake open to the Caribbean Sea. A coastal lake, Maracaibo rests atop vast oil reserves that provide economic wealth for Venezuela.



Figure 3. Colonial activity in South America.

B. European Colonialism

South America's colonial legacy shaped its early cultural landscape. The indigenous people, with their empires and local groups, were no match for the Iberian invaders who brought European colonialism to the continent. South America was colonized exclusively by two main Iberian powers: Spain colonized the western part of the South America, and Portugal colonized the east coast of what is present-day Brazil. The only region that was not colonized by those two powers

was the small region of the **Guianas**, which was colonized by Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France.

Everything changed with the invasion of the Iberian colonizers. The underlying tenets of culture, religion, and economics of the local indigenous people were disrupted and forced to change. It is no mystery why the two dominant languages of South America are Spanish and Portuguese and why Roman Catholicism is the realm's dominant religion. Colonialism also was responsible for transporting food crops such as the potato, which originated in the Peruvian Andes, to the European dinner table. Today, coffee is a main export of Colombia, Brazil, and other countries in the tropics. Coffee was not native to South America but originated in Ethiopia and was transferred by colonial activity. The same is true of sugarcane, bananas, and citrus fruits; oranges were not native to South America, but today Brazil is the number one exporter of orange juice. Colonialism was driven by the desire for profit from the quick sale of products such as gold or silver, and there was a ready market for goods not found in Europe, such as tobacco, corn, exotic animals, and tropical woods.

Colonialism

*The Iberian Invasion
of South America*

**Spain and
Portugal
Main
Colonizers**



Figure 4. Colonialism in South America. The two main colonizers in South America were Spain and Portugal. The Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro defeated the Inca Empire.

Plantation agriculture introduced by the Europeans led to a high demand for manual laborers. When the local populations could not meet the labor demand, millions of African workers were brought through the slave trade. These African slaves introduced their own unique customs and traditions, altering the culture and demographics of the Western Hemisphere. The current indigenous Amerindian population, a fraction of what it was before the Europeans arrived, makes up only a small percentage of South America's total population. Europeans colonizers generally took the best land and controlled the economic trade of the region. The acculturation in South America is directly related to the European colonial experience.



Figure 5. The Jesuit Church of La Compañía de Jesús on the Plaza de Armas in Cuzco, Peru. The original church was constructed in 1571 on the site of the ancient Incan palace. The earthquake of 1650 caused severe damage to the building, so it had to be reconstructed in about 1688. Many Catholic cathedrals in Latin America were built with stones from ancient sites. This cathedral is claimed to be the Western Hemisphere's most ideal example of colonial baroque architecture.

C. The Inca Empire and Francisco Pizarro

Not long after Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire of Mexico in 1521, a young Spanish conquistador named **Francisco Pizarro**, stationed in what is now Panama, heard rumors of silver and gold found among the South American people. He led several sailing excursions along the west coast of South America. In 1531, he founded the port city of Lima, Peru. Since 1200, the Inca had ruled a large empire extending out from central Peru, which included the high-elevation Altiplano Region around Lake Titicaca. **The Inca Empire** dominated an area from Ecuador to Northern Chile. The Inca were not the most populous people but were a ruling class who

controlled other subjugated groups. Pizarro, with fewer than two hundred men and two dozen horses, met up with the Inca armies and managed to defeat them in a series of military maneuvers. The Inca leader was captured by the Spanish in 1533. Two years later, in 1535, the Inca Empire collapsed.

The Inca Empire was significant thanks to the high volume of gold and silver found in that region of the Andes. The mineral wealth of the Andes made the conquistadors rich. Lima was once one of the wealthiest cities in the world. Europeans continued to dominate and exploit the mining of minerals in Peru and Bolivia throughout the colonial era. European elites or a Mestizo ruling class has dominated or controlled the local Amerindian groups in the Andes since colonial times.

D. The Iberian Division of the Continent

The Spanish conquistadors were not the only European invaders to colonize South America. Colonial influence—which forced a change in languages, religion, and economics—also came from the small European kingdom of Portugal. Portuguese ships sailed along the eastern coast of South America and laid claim to the region for the king. The Portuguese did not find large gold or silver reserves, but they coveted the land for the expansion of their empire. Soon the Spanish and the Portuguese were fighting over the same parts of South America. In 1494, the issue was brought before the Roman Catholic Church. **The Tordesillas Line** was drawn on a map to divide South America into the Spanish west and the Portuguese east. The region that is now Brazil became the largest Portuguese colonial possession in South America, a center for plantation agriculture similar to that in the Caribbean. For this reason, a large African population lives in Brazil, and most of the people in Brazil speak Portuguese and are Roman Catholics.

Independence did not come for the Spanish colonies until 1816 and 1818, when Chile and Argentina broke away in an independence movement in the south. **Simón Bolívar** led liberation movements in the north. By 1824, the Spanish were defeated in South America. Brazil did not gain independence from Portugal until 1822, when the prince of Portugal declared an independent Brazil and made himself Brazil's first emperor. It was not until 1889 that a true republic was declared and empire was abolished.

E. Cultural Regions of South America

It is impossible to understand the current conditions in South America without first understanding what occurred to create those conditions. This is why studying European colonialism is so important. Colonialism changed the ethnicity, religion, language, and economic activities of the people in South America. The past five hundred years have tempered, stretched, and molded the current states and regions of the South American continent. To identify standards of living, ethnic majorities, and economic conditions, it is helpful to map out South America's various **cultural regions**.

In South America, five main cultural regions indicate the majority ethnic groups and the main economic activities: **Tropical Plantation Region, Rural Amerindian Region, Amazon Basin, Mixed Mestizo Region, and European Commercial Region (Southern Cone)**.

These are generalized regions that provide a basic understanding of the whole continent. Technological advancements and globalization have increased the integration of the continent to the point that these regions are not as delineated as they once were, but they still provide a context in which to comprehend the ethnic and cultural differences that exist within the realm.



Figure 6. Cultural regions of South America.

Tropical Plantation Region

Located along the north and east coast of South America, the **Tropical Plantation Region** resembles the Caribbean rimland in its culture and economic activity. The region, which extends as far south as the Tropic of Capricorn, has a tropical climate and an agricultural economy. Europeans opened up this area for plantation agriculture because of coastal access for ships and trade. The local people were forced into slavery, but when the local people died off or escaped, millions of African slaves were brought in to replace them. After slavery was abolished,

indentured servants from Asia were brought to the Guianas to work the plantations. The Tropical Plantation Region has a high percentage of people of African or Asian descent.



Figure 7. Young Women in Salvador, Brazil. Salvador, Brazil, is located along the coastal region of South America where the Tropical. Plantation Region was prominent. Most people in this region are of African descent.

Rural Amerindian Region

The **Rural Amerindian Region** includes the countries of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The ruling Mestizo class that inherited control from the European conquistadors mainly lives in urban areas. Most of the rural Amerindian population lives in mountainous areas with type H climates and

ekes out a hard living in subsistence agriculture. This is one of the poorest regions of South America, and land and politics are controlled by powerful elites. The extraction of gold and silver has not benefited the local Amerindian majority, which holds to local customs and speaks local languages.



Figure 8. Amerindians. The Amerindian woman and child in this photo live in the Sacred Valley of the Andes in Peru.

Amazon Basin

The Amazon Basin, which is characterized by a type A climate, is the least-densely populated region of South America and is home to isolated Amerindian groups. Development has encroached upon the region in the forms of deforestation, mining, and cattle ranching. Large deposits of iron ore, along with gold and other minerals, have been found in the Amazon Basin. Preservation of the tropical rain forest of this remote region has been hampered by the destructive pattern of development that has pushed into the region. The future of the basin is

unclear because of development patterns that are expected to continue as Brazil seeks to exploit its interior peripheral region. Conflicts over land claims and the autonomy of Amerindian groups are on the rise.



Figure 9. Amazon River Drainage Basin. The Amazon has more than 1,100 tributaries.

Mixed Mestizo Region

The **Mixed Mestizo Region** includes the coastal area of the west and the interior highlands of the north and east. This region between the Tropical Plantation Region and the Rural Amerindian Region includes a majority of people who share a mixed European and Amerindian ethnicity. It is not as poor as the Rural Amerindian Region and yet not as wealthy as the European-dominated region to the south. Paraguay falls into the Mixed Mestizo Region, as do other portions of other South American countries such as parts of Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. Paraguay is mainly Mestizo, but its economic qualities resemble that of the Rural Amerindian Region to the north, even though Paraguay is not located in the mountains.

European Commercial Region (Southern Cone)

The southern part of South America, called the European Commercial Region or the Southern Cone, includes Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and parts of Brazil. European ethnic groups dominate this region and include not only Spanish and Portuguese but also German, Austrian, Italian, and other European ethnic heritages. Fertile soils and European trade provided early economic growth, and the region attracted industry and manufacturing in the later decades of the twentieth century. There are not many Amerindians or people of African descent here. More than 90 percent of all the people in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay are of European descent and live in urban areas. With a highly urbanized population and with trade connections to a globalized economy, it is no surprise that the Southern Cone is home to South America's most developed economies.

F. Globalization and Trade

South America has been fragmented by European colonialism, which established colonies and economic dependence on its European masters. The colonial economic patterns did not encourage the South American countries to work together to create an integrated continental trade network. Countries outside the continent have promoted trade partnerships to benefit from South America's natural resources and agricultural exports. The establishment of the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) created globalized trading blocs that challenged the South American countries to consider how to take advantage of trading opportunities within their realm to protect and support their own economic interests.

Since the 1990s, cooperation and business ventures have started to form within the realm to create a more integrated network of trade and commerce to benefit the countries of South America. Transportation and communication systems are being developed through joint ventures by internal investment groups. River and road systems continue to be managed and developed for improved transport of people and goods throughout the continent. Free-trade agreements have been implemented to support the integration of internal economic networks and competition in the global marketplace.

In 2008, the South American countries formed the **Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)** to oversee the customs unions and trade agreements within the realm. One of the more established trade associations is **Mercosur (the Southern Cone Common Market)**, created in 1995 by the southern countries. It has evolved to include most countries in South America and is the most dominant trade agreement in the realm. Full members of Mercosur include Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, and Venezuela (although Venezuela's membership was suspended in late 2016). Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia are associate members. **The Andean Community** (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia) was established in 1969 but did not gain ground until 1995, when it established stronger trade measures. Multinational corporations have supported the creation of a **Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)** to include all of the Western Hemisphere in one unified trade association. It has not been approved and has received strong opposition from Mercosur and economic forces that support a more localized economy controlled by local people.

South America faced division and competition during the colonial era between the Spanish and the Portuguese. Today's new era of corporate colonialism has created similar fragmentation and divisions. The level of trade between the countries of South America and the United States and Europe varies widely. Countries such as Colombia and Chile have well-established trade relationships with the United States and are unwilling to jeopardize those trade connections to strengthen ties with their neighbors that have less-supportive political relationships with the United States. External global trade arrangements often provide financial benefits to individual countries that might not be shared by the bordering countries in the same region. South America's historical fragmentation has not made it easy to unify the continent under a singular trade agreement to compete against the European Union or NAFTA.

Key Takeaways

1. The extensive Andes Mountain chain and the massive Amazon River dominate the realm's physical geography.
2. The Spanish and the Portuguese were the two main colonial powers that dominated South America. The Guianas were the only part of the continent not dominated by these two European powers.
3. Identifying the majority ethnic groups in South America can be helpful in classifying the various cultural regions of the realm. Colonial activities and ethnic backgrounds are consistent enough to formulate regions with similar characteristics.
4. Globalization and the creation of economic or political units such as the European Union and NAFTA have prompted the South American countries to work together to implement cooperative trade agreements and create the Union of South American Nations.