

## CHAPTER 32

### *Latin America: Revolution and Reaction into the 21st Century*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Latin America, much of the 20th century witnessed a struggle between the forces of revolution and reaction. The focus of this chapter and the next is on third world nations, which display great diversity and cultural emphasis. In the second half of the 20th century, Latin America took an intermediate position between the nations of the North Atlantic and those of Africa and Asia. Investments often came from the West, and Latin America was vulnerable to the world financial system. Throughout the 20th century, it grappled with issues of social justice, cultural autonomy, and economic security. Workers' organizations emerged as a political force. Explosive urban growth and emigration were often key concerns. Overall, the economy and politics were subject to broad shifts. Although much of Latin America was subject to the rhetoric of social and political change, remarkable little change actually occurred. At the same time, significant transformations took place in education, social services, women's rights, and the role of industry.

**Latin America After World War II.** The end of World War II was not a critical event since the region was only modestly involved. Brazil helped the U.S. steel industry during the war and that sector grew to compete directly with the U.S. by the 1970s. A new round of political agitation occurred after the war. Several authoritarian regimes were challenged; one key example was Argentina.

**Mexico and the PRI.** Mexico continued to be controlled by the PRI but by the end of the 20th century its hold began to loosen. In 2000, Vicente Fox, of the PAN party, won national election. A guerrilla movement popped up in the 1990s; meanwhile, the government joined NAFTA in an effort to spur economic growth.

**Radical Options in the 1950s.** The most important development in the decade after World War II was a surge of radical unrest, often of a socialist nature, and the cold war framework came into play. Of note were events in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Cuba.

**Guatemala: Reform and United States Intervention.** This nation had some of the region's worst problems, including illiteracy, poor health, and high mortality. Its economy depended almost exclusively on bananas and coffee. When leaders challenged the hegemony of U.S. economic interests with radical proposals, the latter nation intervened and backed a pro-U.S. regime, which rose to power. A series of military governments failed to resolve the nation's many woes.

**The Cuban Revolution: Socialism in the Caribbean.** Although the island had periods of prosperity, the world market for sugar, Cuba's main export, revealed the tenuous nature of its economy. A growing disparity between middle and lower economic classes underscored the nation's problems. Batista's rule delivered little on promised reforms, and opposition rose in various sectors. One of his opponents was Fidel Castro, who pledged real democracy, justice, and prosperity for all. Castro and Che Guevara gained support from many sides and overthrew Batista. Castro established collective farms, confiscated property, and set up a Communist

system of repression supported by the U.S.S.R. A U.S.-sponsored intervention failed and the Cuban Missile Crisis became one of the most important events of the Cold War. Since the fall of Communism in Europe, Cuba has become one of the last bastions of that system, but the model of revolution and successful resistance to U.S. pressure was attractive to rebels in other Latin American nations.

**The Search for Reform and the Military Option.** A common theme in Latin America in this era was the political influence of the Catholic church. Liberation theology combined Catholic and socialist concepts to promote change, but this system was criticized by Pope John Paul II. The church did play an important role in the fall of Paraguay's dictator in the 1980s.

**Out of the Barracks: Soldiers Take Power.** The success of the Cuban Revolution impressed and worried those who feared revolutionary change in a Communist mode. Military officers often saw themselves as above politics and best equipped to solve their nation's ills. Many times these leaders had the support of the U.S. In Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Peru, governments were taken over by military-based rulers with repressive authoritarian inclinations. All these regimes were nationalistic but approached economic problems differently; however, the result—little or no growth—was a common theme.

**The New Democratic Trends.** The 1970s and 1980s witnessed an increase in democratization in many Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Panama, but not without problems. Leftist rebel groups continued to agitate in some of them, as in Colombia and Peru. Cuba remained Communist, but under what appeared to be fewer restrictions. Economies continued to struggle, with inflation as a common problem. Despite difficulties, by the 1990s it appeared democratic trends were well established.

**The United States and Latin America: Continuing Presence.** After World War I, the U.S. was clearly the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. In South America private investments by U.S. companies and loans from the government were the chief means of influence. Military intervention became a common means of protecting U.S. interests in Latin America—more than 30 occurred before 1933—and contributed to nationalist reaction. The grounds for these interventions were economic, political, strategic, and ideological. The U.S. Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s and the Alliance for Progress of the 1960s sought to ameliorate tensions. In the 1970s, the U.S.-built and operated Panama Canal was ceded to the Panamanian government. In 1990, that country's dictator was overthrown by U.S. forces.

**In Depth: Human Rights in the 20th Century.** Human rights violations occurred in Latin America in the 1960s and later mirrored actions in other parts of the world. The concept of human rights may go back to the ancient Greeks. Belief in natural law led to the protection of minorities in the 19th century in Europe and the United States. In the 20th century, the United Nations issued a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but included little power of enforcement. What seemed obvious to Western sensibilities was less so in other regions, partly because of economic and/or cultural differences. One big argument had been over what exactly constitutes human rights. Differing political ideologies place different priorities over protecting human rights and employ different strategies to do so.

**Societies in Search of Change.** Societal relations changed slowly in Latin America. Women's status was, however, closer to those of western Europe than Africa. There were many changes, but discrimination continues.

**Slow Change in Women's Roles.** Women were denied the vote until 1929 in Ecuador. By the 1950s, most of the region allowed female franchise. Feminist movements pushed for inclusion into elected offices. Industrial jobs expanded to include women. Shifts in attitudes about women's roles developed more slowly. Overall, as in many other areas, by the beginning of the 21st century, Latin America was in the intermediate position between industrialized and developing nations where the status of women was concerned.

**The Movement of People.** Latin America's population soared in comparison to North America. At the beginning of the 20th century, the major population trend was immigration into Latin America, but long-term trends show migration within and through the region. Illegal immigration from Central America into Mexico and from Mexico into the United States was a major regional issue. Legal migration from Haiti and Cuba because of political dissatisfaction to the U.S. was another big event. Rapid and massive urban growth was yet another common theme in Latin America in this era; in 1999, the region was the most urbanized of the developing world. Problems related to this rapid growth remain. Nationalist and populist politics weakened the ability of the working class to operate effectively in politics.

**Cultural Reflections of Despair and Hope.** The vast majority of Latin Americans are Catholic, but Protestants are making inroads. Music and dance are important parts of popular culture and are influential world-wide. Writers gained world recognition, especially those who penned social criticism and/or employed "magical realism."

**Global Connections: Struggling Toward the Future in a Global Economy.** As Latin America entered the 21st century, it continued to seek economic, social, and political growth and stability. New forms of politics were tried, but many long-standing problems remained. Nevertheless, Latin America was the most advanced region of the "developing" world and in the 1990s its economies grew considerably. Cultural issues remained unresolved and Latin America's global position became increasingly complex.

## KEY TERMS

**Third World:** The developing nations and regions, including Latin America.

**PRI:** Party of the Industrialized Revolution. The political party in Mexico that dominated in the 20th century.

**Zapatistas:** Armed guerrilla movement in the Chiapas region of Mexico in the 1990s.

**NAFTA:** North American Free Trade Agreement. Non-tariff policy between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that began in the 1990s.

**Juan José Arevalo:** Elected president of Guatemala in the 1940s. His attempts at reform brought him into conflict with the United Fruit Company.

**United Fruit Company:** U.S. corporation that controlled the banana trade in much of Latin America. It was the largest foreign-based corporation in that region and it influenced political and social concerns.

**Fulgencio Batista:** Authoritarian ruler of Cuba until overthrown by Castro.

**Fidel Castro:** Communist dictator of Cuba since 1959. Backed up by Soviet regime. The Cuban Revolution he led inspired others to attempt similar models in Latin America.

**“Che” Guevara:** Militant Argentine revolutionary who assisted Castro in Cuba and was killed attempting a similar revolt in Bolivia.

**Liberation Theology:** A combination of Catholic theology and socialism, promoted (but not employed) in Latin America by some clergy and fewer politicians.

**Salvador Allende:** Socialist leader of Chile; overthrown by military junta in 1973.

**Sandinista party:** Leftist political group in Nicaragua backed by the U.S.S.R. Ousted in elections in 1990.

**Augusto Sandino:** Led resistance against U.S. influence in Nicaragua in the 1930s.

**Banana republics:** Term used to describe Latin American nations with corrupt governments.

**Good Neighbor Policy:** U.S. policy toward Latin America, begun in the 1930s, that promised less intervention.

**Alliance for Progress:** U.S. policy toward Latin America, begun in the 1960s, that promised economic aid.

**Favelas:** Brazilian term for shantytowns.

**Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez:** writers rejecting traditional form as unsuitable for representing reality; turned to “magical realism.”

## LESSON SUGGESTIONS

<b>Leader Analysis</b>	Fidel Castro
<b>Conflict Analysis</b>	Cuban Missile Crisis
<b>Change Analysis</b>	Trend toward democracy
<b>Societal Comparison</b>	Latin American, African, and European attitudes toward women
<b>Document Analysis</b>	The People Speak
<b>Inner/Outer Circle</b>	In Depth: Human Rights in the 20th Century