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| **LESSON 5: THE PEOPLE OF LATIN AMERICA**How do people affect Latin America? |
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| **POPULATION PATTERNS**Population growth changes the landscape of a region. What were once small villages in Latin America are now growing cities. These cities attract many people of different cultures.Latin America is growing fast. Population growth is putting new pressures on less developed areas, such as the Amazon Basin, where urban areas have grown in recent years.**High Birth Rates**Some of the region’s highest birth rates are in Central America. Guatemala and Honduras, for example, are expected to double in population by 2050. Most of these people will be living and working in cities such as Guatemala City and San Pedro Sula, Honduras’s most industrial city.Geography also affects where people live. Most people live along the coasts of South America or in the valleys of Mexico and Central America. These areas provide favorable climates, fertile land, and easy access, or reach, to transportation. |

**MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE**

In the past, Europeans, Africans, and Asians came to Latin America in large numbers, either willingly or by force. Immigrants, or people who come to a country from another country to live, have greatly shaped Latin America’s population. Today, people from places as far away as Korea and Syria come to Latin America looking for jobs or personal freedom. People may also immigrate to escape war or famine.

**Emigration**

Latin America also has people who **emigrate**, or leave their own country to live in another. Many Latin American emigrants move to Europe, the United States, or Canada to escape political unrest or to find a better way of life. Many legally enter the United States, while others enter illegally. Some work as scientists and doctors. Others work in low-paying jobs, such as migrant farm work. All of them bring elements, or parts, of their culture with them. Many keep in close contact with family and friends in their home countries. Many also plan to return when economic conditions improve in their home countries.

**Migration**

Many Latin Americans **migrate**, or move, within their country or region. As in many parts of the world, Latin America’s urban areas have increased greatly in population. Fertile land is often in short supply in rural areas. Farming cannot always support a family, and many people leave to find jobs in cities. Most cities are areas of industrialization and offer more hope for getting a job.

**GROWTH OF CITIES**

In the past, most Latin Americans lived in the countryside and worked the land. Today, most of them live in cities. Some of the largest cities in the world are in Latin America, including Mexico City in Mexico, São Paulo in Brazil, and Buenos Aires in Argentina.

**Urban Dwellers**

The number of urban dwellers, however, varies throughout the region. In South America, about 80 percent of people live in cities—about the same as in the United States. In Central America and the Caribbean, only about 65 percent of people are urban dwellers.

Most Latin Americans leave villages for the cities in order to find better jobs, schools, housing, and health care. In many cases, people do not find what they seek. As city populations grow, jobs and housing become scarce. At the same time, many rural people lack the education and skills to find good jobs. Most are not willing to return to the countryside because of the poverty there. As a result, many people live in crowded neighborhoods with poor housing and rising crime.

**ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES**

Latin America is a melting pot of Europeans, Africans, Native Americans, and Asians. Many are of mixed ancestry. Mestizos are people of mixed Native American and European ancestry. **Mulatto**es are people of African and European ancestry. Still others are of African and Native American ancestry. Most Native Americans live in Mexico, Central America, and the Andes countries of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Native Americans in these areas have worked to keep their languages and traditions.

**Settling Latin America**

Since the 1400s, millions of Europeans have settled in Latin America. At first, most were Spanish or Portuguese. Later, Italians, British, French, and Germans came. In the 1800s, many Spanish and Italian immigrants settled in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. As a result, these three nations today are populated mainly by people of European descent.

Latin Americans of African ancestry form a higher percentage of the populations in the Caribbean islands and northeastern Brazil. Their descendants were enslaved Africans. Over the years, Africans have added their rich cultural influences to the food, music, and arts of Latin America.

Many Asians live in the Caribbean islands and some countries of South America. Most came during the 1800s to work as temporary laborers and remained to form communities. In Guyana about one-half the population is of South Asian or Southeast Asian ancestry.

Many people of Chinese descent make their homes in Peru, Mexico, and Cuba. About one million people of Japanese descent live in Brazil, the largest number of Japanese people outside Japan.

Over the centuries, there has been a blending of these different cultures throughout Latin America. In countries such as Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, mestizos make up the largest part of the population. In Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil, people of mixed African and European descent form a large percentage of the population.

**Languages**

Spanish is the most widely spoken language in Latin America. In Brazil most people speak Portuguese. Native American languages are still spoken in many countries. For example, Quechua, spoken centuries ago by the Inca, is an official language of Peru and Bolivia. In the Caribbean, English and French are widely spoken. In some countries, people have developed a **pidgin language** by combining parts of different languages. An example is creole, spoken in Haiti. Most creole words are from French, but the grammar is African.