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The Evolvement of Latin American Cultural Consciousness . . . From its Roots in the Old World to its Impact on the Americas

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the character of the Latin American, to look at its roots in Spanish culture, to discuss the influences that came to bear upon it as the Spanish moved to the New World and to explore its evolution to the present.

Chapter I will deal with the Old World Spanish culture—a short profile of the type of man who first came to the Americas.

Chapter II will briefly explore the geography of the New World—primarily South America including Mexico, Central America and the West Indies.

Chapter III will describe the large cities of Latin America today, their people, and their problems in general.

Chapter IV, the final chapter, will attempt to show Latin America today and the general direction it seems to be taking.

Chapter I

The Spanish Root

To begin to understand the Latin American today we must look into the past to see the kind of man that first came to the America. He was a Spaniard, a conquistadore, who came primarily to conquer, for the glory and profit of Spain, and to spread the Catholic doctrine. He was a man of deep personal dignity, with a great deal of pride and passion, and an utter contempt for death. To the Spaniard, life and death live together to their mutual advantage. His love of life is strong because he understands it is fleeting and precarious. Because of this he disdains death, thereby making it more probable . . . a symbiosis of life and death, thus the making of such men as Cortes, Pizarro, the Conquistadores, the Castellans.

How did these traits come about? According to Elena de Souchere the molding of Spain's geographical environment and the political climate helps to develop these characteristics. She writes, "In the hostile atmosphere, there came into being a hard and willful kind of man, withdrawn into himself. And these characteristics, acquired in the course of a constant struggle against the inclemency of the elements; were accentuated by the African invader, a permanent guerilla on no fixed front." ¹ The fact that these Moslems

could appear at any time presented a constant danger to the Castillian Spaniard. This common danger tended to be a social equalizer because each man had to provide for his own defense. "Every man was, above all, a man alone, faced with danger with arid land, with death everywhere and ever present." ²

These were some of the characteristics of the old world Spaniards. They also had a relaxed attitude toward race. A reason George Pendle writes, is that the Spaniards were influenced by the Moslems.

The Moslems took control of Spain during the early 700's, all except the very mountainous area in the northern part of the Iberian peninsula. There, several small Christian kingdoms began a campaign to oust the Moslems from Spain. They began to fight back against the Moslem conquerors.

Between 700 and 1000, the Moors settled among their Christian subjects, married with them, and adopted many of the Spanish customs. After 1100, however, the territory that remained in Moslem hands was broken up into a number of small states. It was then easier for the Christian kingdoms of Spain to overcome their enemies. By 1000, the struggle to reconquer Spain was underway. It continued on and off for almost 500 years, until the last Moslems were defeated at Granada in 1492.

As the struggle against the Moslems drew to a close a new struggle and adventure was beginning . . . the discovery of the New World. As one great enterprise (the defeat of the Moslems) was coming to an end and another was beginning, the Spanish people continued to live in the passioncharged tension of a great task where self would achieve victory over death. The Spaniard was always ready to prove himself, that his irreplaceable "self" might not die, that he might always persist in the integrity of his being. Hernan Cortes caused his ships to be burned in port so there would be no return in failure: it was a case of conquer or die.

Jane Schneider in her article "Of Vigilance and Virgins", writes about the role of women in the psychological makeup of the Mediterranean. When determination of boundary lines is subject to continual human interaction, a concern for honor develops (as in the case of the Moslem fighter, mounted on a fast horse ready to intervene as in Castillian Spain). There is no strong government to protect him so the Spaniard must defend his "self", his honor in an individual family structure. The women become the focal point of perpetuality, the blood line, the family, the honor.

This is the Spaniard, then, who will come to the New World—an individualist used to uncertainties, unwilling to accept failure, conditioned to fight geographical elements, ready to accept another great task. From his loins he will perpetuate the "machismo".

Chapter II

The Geography of Latin America

The Spaniard that came to the New World was a man conditioned to a hostile environment. Most of the conquistadores came from arid lands against which they constantly struggled. Here were men thousands of miles away from home, in an unfriendly and unfamiliar surroundings; the possibility of returning to Spain out of the question, and with only one thought in mind . . . succeed or perish.

There is some evidence that after the initial conquest some of the soldiers settled in the environment that was most like home. The men who came from the Atlantic coast of Spain where the climate was moist and rainy tended to settle along the coastal plains of Latin America or the West Indies, while those from the inland highlands of Castille tended to settle in the highlands of Peru and Mexico.

It was because of this varied region that a variety of cultures evolved. Culture and environment are linked. A culture is molded by the geographic conditions that surround it. Therefore different geographic conditions developed a culture which was more or less in tune with whatever the land was willing to give up or whatever the culture was able to extract from it, according to its degree of development.

In Latin America the climate differed from one place to another. Plants and animals were different from place to place and certainly from the Old World and what the newcomers were used to when people were many miles apart they were out of touch with each other. Each man had to adapt to his own particular environment.

The climate, soils, landforms, and minerals in various parts of Latin America have meant something different to farmers. Each group has had a different technological base and has perceived the resource possibilities differently. Cabeza de Vaca writes in *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America* how each tribe of Indians he encountered had their own way of surviving against the elements and those Indians he encountered whose surroundings were somewhat more generous fared better than those who lived in a more hostile environment. The tribes who did not spend their entire day hunting or foraging for food were those whose culture far surpassed all others. It was these tribes that the Conquistadores conquered and then built into the Latin America we know today.

Latin America is an area of great physical contrast. It contains some of the world's highest mountains to regions just above sea level. It has great temperate plains, impenetrable jungles, areas of population density that cannot be matched and an interior with hardly any human inhabitants. In terms of area it is several times larger than the United States. Its population is predicted to be several times that of the United States by the end of the century.

Latin America contains five physical features which are of importance—its locations, its mountains, great river valleys, extensive coastal plain, and its islands. Most of Latin America lies within the tropics. This fact has profoundly affected the nature of its population and economics and the social problems of the various countries.

A chain of mountains forms the geographic backbone of America. This chain begins in Alaska, passes through the United States and Canada, down the western part of the entire New World, and ends only a short distance from Antarctica. The mile high plateaus of Mexico decline into much lower mountains in Central America, to rise again into the second highest group of mountains in the world called the Andes. In northern South America the Andes fan out to form wide plateaus and deep valleys.

In Chile the plateaus disappear and become two ranges a few score miles apart from the great Central Valley of Chile. The chain then continues down the coast to Sierra Del Fuego. The Andes extend for over four thousand miles with peaks as high as the 23,081 feet of Mount Aconcagua on the Argentine-Chilean frontier. The Bolivia plateau in many places is over 14,000 feet high. Even in the islands of the West Indies there are mountain peaks and small mountain ranges. On the east coast of South America an escarpment of low mountains has caused the rivers of the area to reroute their flow, to meander thousands of miles before emptying into the sea.

This geography has molded the societies of the countries they run through. The mountains are rich in deposits of iron, tin, lead, zinc and other minerals. The plateaus and valleys provide rich agricultural and grazing areas. Streams and rivers which run rapidly from the mountains provide South America with a rich potential for hydropower.

These mountain ranges cause a number of regions in the tropical zone to have climate more like that of the temperate zone. There are large plateaus where climate varies from springlike to exceedingly cold and are among the most heavily populated rural areas in South America. Other populations are found in the deep valleys that lie many thousands of feet above sea level throughout the Andes range. This is particularly true in the states of Sao Paulo and Parana in Brazil. The chief problem in the development of such a mountainous region has been in the difficulty for modern transportation to traverse these ranges. It was not until the twentieth century that Bolivia and Ecuador were linked to the outside world.

The next outstanding geographical feature is the South America river valley. One of the world's largest rivers, the Amazon, meanders some thirtythree hundred miles from its origin in the Andes, within 100 miles of the Pacific Ocean to its vast mouth in the Atlantic. It drains an area approximately 2,700,000 square miles. It is navigated by ocean going vessels for a thousand miles upstream, to the port of Manaus, while commercial navigation continues as high as Iquitos some 2,300 miles from the mouth.

The Amazon Valley proper is covered by dense tropical rain forest dominated by huge trees whose intertwining branches are so thick that it is difficult to see the complete ray of sunlight. Alejo Carpentier describes it as "a brutal fecundity, an implacable proliferation." ³ Only the Indian and part Indian native of the area have so far been able to resist the rigors of this climate, which has repelled both Negro and white settlers. The problem of cultivating this area is the lightness of the soil and the torrential rainfall. Once the tropical cover has been removed, the soil is leached away by the heavy rainfall.

Another river system is the Orinoco rising in northern Brazil and flowing mostly through Venezuela. It is navigable for 1,000 miles but flows mainly through tropical rain forests and isolated plains. Columbia has the Magdalena River, which is virtually the life stream of that country because it is the principal means of transportation.

The river system of the Rio de la Plata is probably the most important at the present. The Rio de la Plata is the name for the estuary through which the Parana, Paraguay, and the Uruguay rivers empty into the Atlantic Ocean. This river system rises in the interior of the Continent, and most of the streams of the southern two thirds of South America which do not flow into the Amazon empty into either the Parana or the Paraguay. They are the main arteries of commerce for eastern Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

The coastal regions are the principal population centers of South America. There are narrow plains along both the Atlantic and the Pacific shores of South America and the Pacific and Caribbean coast of Mexico and Central America. In the southern third of South America, the flat area widens out dramatically to form the vast pampas of Argentina, Uruguay and southern Brazil, reaching right up to the foothills of the Andes. The tropical coast of Mexico is inhospitable to the majority of Mexicans who are used to living in dry and semitemperate highlands. The main population centers of the Central American republics, except Guatemala and Costa Rica, are in the Pacific coastal area. The Caribbean coasts of Nicaragua and part of Honduras have very few people. In South America the large port cities of Guayaquil, Lima and several leading Chilean cities are on the Pacific coast. The population of these coast cities is shared with the plateaus and valleys of the Andes. On the eastern coast are located most of the important cities of Brazil, as well as Montevideo, in Uruguay, and most of the Argentine urban centers are also in the coastal plain, or close to it. Also in this area are the pampas or great flat plains that stretch inland from the Atlantic Ocean to the foothills of the Andes.

The final physical feature is the islands, the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Most of the islands are hilly or even mountainous with relatively little arable land except for Cuba and Barbados. The land along the coast of the

Caribbean islands is very fertile and an important source of sugar. This accounts for the fact that these islands are heavily populated with blacks who were introduced there as slaves to support the sugar industry. Most of these islands are tops of high mountains while others are coral outcrops.

The geography of Latin America, then, has determined the kind of civilization that has evolved. The Indians are found in the mountainous areas, the Blacks are found basically in the islands and along the hot coastal plains, and the Europeans primarily in the temperate southern region. The geography has caused a lack of development in the mountains and in the tropical river valleys.

Just as Spain's mixture of terrain and people caused a variety of personalities, so this same combination had the same effect in the New World. New kingdoms were formed, isolated from each other because of the geography, and these kingdoms formed different personalities.

The geography of the land together with the aversion to concession and compromise might be one of the reasons for the unrest and lack of cohesion in Latin America today.

Chapter III

Areas of Density of the Latin American Population in South America

There are over 600 million people living in America. Knowing this it is difficult to imagine that 30,000 years ago not one person lived in the Americas.

The Western Hemisphere includes two continents, or great bodies of land. These continents are North and South America. North America is made up of Canada, Greenland, the United States, Mexico and the nations of Central America, and the West Indies. There are more than 7,000 islands in the West Indies, some too small for people to live on. Of the inhabited islands, some are independent nations while others are governed by or have close ties to independent nations. Central America is also considered part of the continent of North America. There are seven Central American nations.

The continent of South America is not as large as North America. There are twelve independent nations in South America. Each country has unique people, cultures, and resources.

Patagonia, which is the name given to the southern parts of Chile and Argentina, is bleak, isolated and poorly suited for human life. Yet people have learned to live there. In Chile, Patagonia reaches from the island of Chiloé to the tip of Cape Horn. Only a handful of people live in this remote area. Most of Patagonia is cold and wild—a place of high winds and heavy rains, of steep rocky slopes and storm tossed waters. It would be hard to find a more unpleasant climate. There are only a few hours of sunshine, a few hours when the wind is not blowing . . . snow and sleet are common all winter. Because the climate is so bleak and the land such a wilderness, most of the people of this area raise sheep for a living on a narrow strip of grassland on the eastern side of the Andes. Sheep raising is one of the few ways that a living could be drawn out of this wilderness.

An ancient legend says that a god spoke to the wandering Aztec tribe in 1325. The god told the Aztecs to look for a place where they would find an eagle sitting on a cactus and eating a snake. At that spot the god commanded the Aztecs to build the city of Tenochtitlan. Almost two hundred years later the Spaniards conquered the Aztecs and built a new city on the site of the old. They called the new city Mexico.

Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. It is one of the most beautiful cities in the world with broad boulevards

lined with palm trees, quiet green parks, and fountains. Until the late 1950's, the air was so pure, that people could sit in the parks and look up and see in a distance snow peaked mountains. This no longer exists. It is now a city with a population of approximately 17 million people, where people flock, hoping to find jobs. Mexico City's exploding population has produced many problems. Most of the newcomers flocking to the city are poor people from the countryside. They have no choice but to live in Mexico City's older, poorer neighborhoods, causing severe slum problems. There seems to be no hope for the people as they are uneducated and unskilled. Mexico itself is having severe economic problems and until the country can find a way to resolve these problems, Mexico City's problems will continue to grow.

Rio de Janeiro is perhaps Brazil's most beautiful city. It is tucked in between the lush forested mountains and the waters of Guanabara Bay, which leads out into the Atlantic Ocean. Tourists come from around the world to see such sites as Sugar Loaf and Corcovado Mountains which rise from the middle of the city. Rio is a bustling industrial and trading center.

The people of Rio have a variety of ancestral backgrounds. Many of the descendants are black slaves who were brought to Brazil by the Portuguese during colonial times. Many others are of mixed ancestry. Rio also has people who have migrated from Portugal, Spain, Italy and Germany. Most of the people speak Portuguese, the official language of Brazil.

Rio has a population of eight million people and because the area of the city is not large, the population density is extremely heavy. There is an average of more than eight thousand people per square mile. This overpopulation brings other problems. Many of the rural newcomers from the rural west are greeted with disappointment. Often they cannot find jobs or proper housing. Many of these people—one out of every five—are forced to live in favelas, ramshackle slums that skirt the hills bordering the city.

The inhabitants of the favelas are critically poor. They make their homes out of anything that they can get, tin cans, old boards, or mud. There is no garbage collection or sewage, no electricity, no running water. However, these circumstances do not prevent newcomers from flocking to the city desperately seeking to improve their lives. With inflation high and poverty running wild, Brazil is looking to the interior of its Amazon basin for its potential resources. As yet, nothing has materialized.

The Amazon basin is a huge equatorial region in northern Brazil. Filled with swarming, biting insects, it is the home of poisonous scorpions and caterpillars. Huge snakes slither on land, piranhas are in the rivers, and crocodiles in the swamps. Time has stood still in this area. Only a few Indians are able to live satisfactorily there. The colonists left this area alone, for as far as they were concerned, it contained no gold nor was it fit for raising sugar cane. Recently, however, the area has yielded substantial amounts of minerals, and some people believe may just be the tip of the iceberg.

Ranchers, farmers and loggers are settling in the area, bringing with them twentieth century problems. They are threatening to deforest the area by the year 2000; this last great virgin forest would then perish. The Amazonian Indian has also been affected by the settlers; many have died from the diseases brought into the area. Thousands have been forced to move to reserves out of their native jungle and their future seems uncertain.

Buenos Aires, in Argentina, has many of the same problems that plague other South American cities. Nonetheless, Buenos Aires has a larger middle class than any other South American city. These people enjoy modern conveniences and comfortable homes. Their lives are not unlike those of people living in suburbs in the United States.

A brief comment must be made about the Andean Nations. There have been many reforms in the last several decades such as giving ownership of land to more people—giving the people selfgovernment with its leaders having more opportunity to effect positive reform. Although these reforms have made some improvements in Andean life, they have not brought prosperity, stable governments or a sense of security to the people. The resources in this area are great, but so is the fear of continuing poverty and of hard rule under dictatorship.

Early in 1528 Pedro de Alvarado founded the city of San Salvador, the second largest city in Central America and present day capital of the republic of El Salvador. The city of San Salvador is only 25 miles from the Pacific Ocean, and the goods made in San Salvador are exported to markets all over the world. San Salvador is faced with many of the same problems that face other big cities in Latin America. People flow into the city in an endless tide, but are offered little but terrible poverty because of a lack of work.

The uneven distribution of wealth and land in El Salvador has long been a source of conflict. For years that land in this country has been divided into huge haciendas owned by a small number of wealthy people. Governments have tried to divide the wealth more evenly but have never been able to do so with any great measure of success. The military has been on the side of the wealthy landowners and so has been able to defeat the less fortunate people. The conflict still continues today and has blossomed into a civil war. Only longlasting governments will be able to carry out the wishes and needs of the people.

Puerto Rico, a densely populated island of more than 3 million people, and belongs to the Greater Antilles group. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth state, which means it governs itself under its own constitution yet is held to many United States federal laws. Historically Puerto Rico has been a very poor nation. Sugar cane, its major crop, has provided most of the jobs on the island. Economic improvements helped Puerto Rico through an ambitious industrialization program. Puerto Rico today has a high standard of living compared to that of the other West Indies nations, and its cities have a modern look. Despite its relative prosperity, the average income in Puerto Rico is less than \$4,000.00 a year. In search of El Dorado, approximately onethird of its entire population has migrated to the United States. Most of the Puerto Ricans have either come to the United States or know someone who has. Many of the ones who come here go back, disillusioned totally. Most of the Puerto Ricans who emigrate to the United States settle in New York City, where they inherit the worst possible living conditions. They find it difficult to move up the social scale as the other groups from other lands have before them. The reason, some say, is that because of their mixed heritage they are considered as part of the minority group and do not have the same opportunity as the nonEnglish speaking white migrations did in the past. Whatever the reason, the Puerto Rican immigrant seems to be snarled in a dilemma over which he has virtually no control.

Chapter IV

Latin American Culture As It Is Today And The Direction It Seems To Be Taking

Latin American culture exists despite the great ethnic diversity among the people. In some areas native Indians dominate, particularly in Central America and in the Andes highlands from Columbia down through Peru. In Argentina, parts of Brazil, and in Venezuela, English, German and Italian roots are significant. In Guyana there are areas dominated by East Indians. In others still, such as the West Indies, African slaves are the major components of the population. Europeans are prominent everywhere in Latin America, and in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay have not mixed with other groups. Elsewhere they are part of an integration that has produced people of every skin color.

An article by Roberto Fernandez Retamar quotes from Liberator Simon Bolivar in his message to the Congress

of Angostura (1819):

Let us bear in mind that our people is neither European nor North American, but a composite of Africa and America, rather than an emanation of Europe; for even Spain fails as a European people because of her African blood, her institutions, and her character. It is impossible to assign us with any exactitude to a specific human family. The greater part of the native people have been annihilated; the European has mingled with the American and with the African, and the latter with the Indian and the European. Born from the womb of a common mother, our fathers, different in origin and blood, are foreigners; all differ visibly in the epidermis, and this dissimilarity leaves marks of the greatest transcendence. ⁴

Retamar cites from the Mexican author Jose Vasconcelos, “that a new race was being forged, made with the treasure of all the previous ones, the final race, the cosmic race.” ⁵

The most interesting statement of Retamar’s forward is the explanation of the Latin American’s culture as a rough draft or copy of European bourgeois culture. I will attempt to expand this concept in later paragraphs within this chapter.

Retamar continues that the root of the problem is the language the Latin American has to use. According to Retamar,

We have only a few languages with which to understand one another; those of the colonizers while other colonials or excolonials, in the metropolitan centers, speak among themselves in their own language, we Latin Americans continue to use the language of our colonizers. These are the *linguas francas* capable of going beyond the frontiers which neither the aboriginal nor creole languages succeed in crossing. Right now as we are discussing, as I am discussing with those colonizers, how else can I do it except in one of their languages, which is now our language and with so many of their conceptual tool, which are also our conceptual tools? ⁶

South American or Latin American cultures begin with European languages, attitudes and conceptual tools. But how else can something be started?

Within the embryo of the new born must be all the past experiences of the embryo’s ancestry—the Genesis of the New World is that Old World with all the conceptual tools and languages.

Let us examine in a limited way Retamar’s statement. The Spaniards came to conquer, not to colonize. The land was plundered, the natives made slaves, and the women bore their children. When the Indian population was decimated either from slaughter or disease, black slaves were brought in to take up the slack. Children of the conquistadors, mestizos, mulattos, inherited their fathers’ traits and became the fierce caudillos who constantly fought against each other to see who would rule.

Once independence from Spain was achieved, Latin Americans did not have to unite as a single nation to protect themselves from other great powers. It is out of this violent past, in which the native culture was almost entirely obliterated, that some of the inherent problems of Latin America were generated.

To further explore Latin America let us examine its three basic institutions, the military, the church, and its system of education.

The stereotyped image of the Latin American military officer is one of strutting around with a vest full of medals hung on a brilliant uniform looking for a “coup.” There is a certain amount of truth to this picture, but

it is a rapidly changing one. One has to realize that most of Latin America was colonized by military men who in most cases became the ruling bodies. Ruling military structures tend to make decisions for the population. They cannot be voted out, therefore the “coup” by other military men. This, then, leads to the propagation of this type of government.

The Catholic Church arrived in America along with the conquistadores. The military used force to destroy the political and military power of the natives while the Church used the cross to obliterate their religion. The problem is that they did not completely wipe out the native Indian religious customs. This, coupled with other factors, has presented problems in Latin America today. The Indian seems to have become withdrawn, sullen, and distrusting of everyone else. Many still revert to some of their old customs. They are still discriminated against and seem to ignore any national cohesion. This is a very difficult problem to deal with and will not be easy to resolve.

The educational system is beginning to show some progress but still has a long way to go. In the past the only people to be educated were the families of the elite. Many of the sons of the elite were sent to Spain and Portugal for further training. The families of the poor received little or no education at all. Vocational training was not offered to the peasant to improve his ability in agriculture, nor did it prepare him for any type of work in the cities.

Illiteracy has always been a major problem in Latin America. However, several countries such as Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela and Chile have made improvements. With continued efforts Latin America seems to be solving this problem.

All these factors—the military, religion, and educational systems—have contributed to the notion that Latin America is an underdeveloped area. Latin America is considered today as part of the worldwide movement of the “underdeveloped” countries for a place in world affairs. One must realize that Latin America certainly has been in the forefront of such movements dating back to the Mexican Revolution.

One of the modern Latin American political thinkers was Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, the Peruvian leader. He urged the dismantling of the traditional society and the hastening of economic, social and political development for the benefit of the Latin American countries themselves and not for external investors. Help from the outside should be directed to those areas in need of help as determined by the Latin Americans themselves and this should be done on a region to region basis. He also called for the unification of all Latin American nations into one united Latin America. The geography and variety of ingrained traditions make this a very difficult task.

In the political climate, communism is another force for Latin Americans to deal with. In Cuba the Communists have come to full power. Communism still hasn't gained acceptance throughout Latin America, but they have built parties in every country.

Another trend of political and social thought has emerged called the Jacobin left. They also agree that institutions responsible for age old injustices and for stunting national development should be destroyed. The Jacobins do not believe in freedom of speech etc. and consider due process as a road block to attaining their goals.

There are some Latin Americans such as urban industrial workers, peasants, the new middle class and intellectuals who strongly believe that unless Latin American nations can do away with the latfundium systems—old elite land owners and other residual effects of the colonial past, all future development will be

stymied. They also believe that in the future Latin America will align itself with only situations and countries which serve their own best interest.

With a land so diverse in its geography, so diverse in its traditions and cultures, born in the violence of the Old World meeting the New World, one can at least begin to see the difficult tasks of its leaders, present and future, in whose hands the future of Latin America will lie.

(figure available in print form)

Atlas of South America.

(figure available in print form)

Western Hemisphere: Major Landforms and Water Bodies.

Lesson #1

Goal To teach some of the achievements of the Aztecs and Incan civilization.

Objectives

1. To learn about the Aztecs civilization.
2. To learn about the Incan civilization.

Materials A map of Mexico showing the Aztec Empire, and of South America, showing Incan Empire. Crayon, blank maps of Mexico and South America, compass.

Procedure

1. Have students color in blank map showing boundaries of Aztec and Incan Empire.
2. Have them determine the longitude and latitude of these empires.
3. Determine the climate these two empires were located in.
4. Compare the two empires.
5. Have students write which empire they would prefer to be part of and why.

Lesson #2

Goal

1. To learn about the Rio de la Plata.
2. To learn about the boundaries of the countries around the Rio de la Plata.
3. To learn about the major land features in the regions in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.
4. To learn about major cities in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Materials Map of the Rio de la Plata region, ruler, crayon.

Procedure

1. Have students point out the rivers that flow into the Rio de la Plata.
2. Discuss how a major river system near a city affects people who live in the city.
3. Plot the longitude and latitude of the region and discuss the type of climate you will find in this region—why?
4. Have students read material on the Gran Chaco, The Pampas, and Patagonia. How are they alike, how are they different?

Lesson #3

Goal To teach the students the reason why the Conquistadores came to the New World, the reason why the Conquistadores were able to conquer the Indians with so few numbers, the impact of the Old World culture meeting up with the New World culture.

Materials Maps of Mexico and Peru, crayons.

Procedure

1. Have students describe the Aztec and Incan culture—how might they have been alike? How might they have been different?
2. Describe the types of weapons the Spaniards used compared to the Indians.
3. Have students compare the geography of the Aztec empire to that of the Incan empire.
4. Have students write a short paper describing how life styles of the native Indians changed.

Lesson #4

The following is a dialogue that can be used in a classroom. Students can read the parts aloud.

1. Do the students agree with La Casa or with W.W.C. Have them give their viewpoints.
2. Ask students if they believe the Indians were like La Casa described.
3. Ask the students if they believe criticism is important in a society. Do they like to be criticized.
4. Would the students prefer to live as did? If so, why?
5. Have students write a paper on what they think a society should be like .

Lesson #5

A Dialogue

C haracters:

Montaigne—Montezuma—La Casa and Western World Culture (W.W.C.)

La Casa : (introductory statement) And of all the universe of humanity, these people (Indians) are the most guileless, the most devoid of wickedness and duplicity, the most obedient and faithful to their native masters and to the Spanish Christians whom they serve . . . these people are the most devoid of rancors, hatreds, or desire for vengeance of any people in the world. And because they are so weak and complaisant, they are less able to endure heavy labor and soon die no what the malady . . . they have no desire to possess worldly goods. For this reason they are not arrogant, embittered or greedy.

Moderator : Is that your opening statement, La Casa?

La Casa : No, I have more.

Montezuma : I hope not, La Casa. I know lawyers tend to exaggerate but in your zeal to exonerate from all human weaknesses, your statement sounds like an indictment.

W.W.C.: Sounds like La Casa is describing my dog.

Montaigne : May I make a point. I will be brief and use countless analogies.

W.W.C.: Please no. Montaigne. I regard you as a man after the fact. A Monday morning quarterback.

La Casa : But he helps my case. Are you saying we don't need him?

W.W.C.: Oh no! I didn't say that—with his pretty way of saying things, he is our conscience, a critic of our society. Keeps us in line, tries to "hone" our society toward perfection. Only a thinking society has such people.

Montezuma : My society is just as highly civilized in its own way.

La Casa : And without the evils of your society W.W.C.

Montaigne : Yes, and the Indians honor is as sacred as his children to him—he does not plunder for greed, he only takes what he needs and he is in tune with nature.

W.W.C.: So are cockroaches—but what do they offer? Let us examine the virtues of your Indian society, then we will examine mine.

W.W.C.: Is your tribe the mightiest in all Mexico?

Montezuma : Yes.

W.W.C.: You worship your gods with rituals of human sacrifice.

Montezuma : Yes, but only for the welfare of all because it pleases the gods.

W.W.C.: And your society is in tune with nature.

Montezuma : Of course, this is really our claim to fame.

W.W.C.: How did your tribe become the mightiest in all of Mexico? You need not answer, history knows the answer. And, of course, the tribe needed all the lands of Mexico from east to west and as far south as the Honduras along with all the plunder and slaves these conquests rendered. Is this called taking only what you needed?

Montezuma : This was merely a tribute to our honor and courage which was the only thing that mattered.

W.W.C.: It seems to me that the only thing that mattered was that the self (ego) was fed. It in itself is a kind of vice when it is accomplished at the cost of others. Now this confuses me, where

is the group of people La Casa was talking about earlier? Only an animal is innocent and pure with all the aforementioned traits. This idea about eating the flesh of the vanquished to acquire their traits is simply an aboriginal idea. And of your gods Montezuma . . . leaders and winners always sacrifice followers and losers to their gods. If your gods were held in really high esteem, then shouldn't you sacrifice only the best? A dilemma!! Last, but not least, your regard to bring in tune to nature. Nature doesn't live in tune with itself, it is in constant upheaval and change and we being part of nature, change and apply change.

Montaigne : How about your culture, W.W.C., from where I stand it suffers from many evils and is in its own way barbaric. To quote from Montaigne, it is like "the pot calling the kettle black."

W.W.C.: Let's examine my culture the same way. In the matter of worshipping gods. Yes, we do this also and in the name of our God have committed some of the vilest deeds akin to your cultures. As far as our honor is concerned, I don't believe it is any better or worse than yours, all things considered. Where we differ, I believe, is in our aims and how to achieve them. We believe the intellect is to be used for the right of the individual and the progress of mankind to try to rise above nature, to control it rather than be controlled by it. The intellect will eventually rise above the environment for the good of all mankind. On our way to try to accomplish our goals we do suffer from the side effects or evils if you will, and sometimes adopt your totalitarian approach of telling other societies how to act. One of the evils encountered in a progressive or forward moving act. Montezuma, while your society is camping out and enjoying nature, someone has to stay home and mind the store. We are, therefore, open to criticism. I think your society is merely at a younger stage in its development. If and when your society is exposed to enough thought it will evolve and change because time and change is the natural setting for man. Then, Montezuma, will a society be really in tune with nature.

Notes

1. de la Souchere, Elena.
"An Explanation of Spain", Random House, New York, 1964, p. 20.
2. Ibid, p. 24.
3. Carpentier, Alejo.
"Explosion in a Cathedral", Harper and Row, New York, 1979, p. 213.
4. Retamar Roberto Fernandez.
"The Massachusetts Review, WinterSpring", 1974, p. 9.
5. Ibid, p. 10.
6. Ibid, p. 10.

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