

Central America and the Caribbean

A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE Central America forms an isthmus, a land bridge between North and South America. It also divides two oceans. This geographic fact has made the region attractive to the United States and other major world powers and has helped to keep the area fragmented and politically unstable. For example, in the early 20th century, the United States wanted to build a canal across Panama that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. In 1903, Panama was still a province of Colombia, which did not like the idea. The United States encouraged a revolution in Panama, and when it won its independence, Panama granted the United States a ten-mile-wide zone in which to build a canal. Central America had become a crossroads of world trade.

Native and Colonial Central America

Central America is a cultural hearth as well as a crossroads. A **cultural hearth** is a place from which important ideas spread. Usually, it is the heartland or place of origin of a major culture. The Mayan people built a great civilization in the area that spread throughout the region. The homeland of the Maya stretched from southern Mexico into northern Central America. During the 800s, the Maya began to abandon many of their cities. Why they did so remains a mystery to be solved by archaeologists.

Native Peoples, 1492



Main Ideas

- Native peoples, Europeans, and Africans have shaped the culture of this region.
- The economies of the region are based primarily on agriculture and tourism.

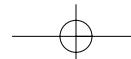
Places & Terms

- cultural hearth**
- United Provinces of Central America**
- Panama Canal**
- calypso**
- reggae**
- informal economy**

CONNECT TO THE ISSUES

INCOME GAP The people of Central America and the Caribbean face an uneven distribution of income as one of the effects of colonialism.

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image in the textbook.



MAYAN INFLUENCE The Maya built many cities with temples and palaces in present-day Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Each city was an independent state ruled by a god-king and served as a center for religious ceremony and trade. One of their most spectacular cities was Tikal, located in the dense, steamy jungle of northern Guatemala, considered the center of Mayan civilization. The pyramids at Tikal were among the tallest structures in the Americas until the 20th century. The influence of the Maya spread over a region from Mexico to El Salvador. The Mayan culture was carried to other regions through military alliances and trade.

THE SPANISH IN CENTRAL AMERICA The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in Mexico opened the door to Spanish control of Central America. Spain ruled Central America until the 19th century. Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821. Up to that point, Central America had been governed from Mexico. In 1823, however, the whole region declared its independence from Mexico and took the name of the **United Provinces of Central America**.

By the late 1830s, the United Provinces had split into separate nations. These became El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras. Later, Panama broke off from Colombia and became an independent country in Central America. Belize, a former British colony, broke away from British Honduras.

HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION This pyramid at Tikal towers over the great plaza of the ancient city. A temple sits on top of the pyramid.

What might this and similar buildings at Tikal suggest about Mayan civilization?

LATIN AMERICA

Native and Colonial Caribbean



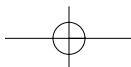
Using the Atlas

Use the maps on pages 216 and 222. Why might the Caribbean have been settled by more European powers than was Central America?

Although Central America was ruled by Spain, the Caribbean was settled and claimed by many European powers. In addition, Africans who were brought to the Caribbean as slaves played an important role in the settling of the Caribbean.

CARIBBEAN INFLUENCES When Christopher Columbus reached the Caribbean islands in 1492, he thought he had reached the East Indies in Asia. Therefore, he called the natives “Indians.” The inhabitants of these islands called themselves the Taino (TY•noh). The Spanish settled some of the islands and established sugar plantations, which were well suited to the climate and soil of the islands. They attempted to use the Taino as forced labor, but many of the natives died from disease and mistreatment.

To replace the Taino, European slave traders brought Africans to the Caribbean by force and put them to work on plantations. As a result, Africans have had a lasting influence on Caribbean life and culture.



Caribbean Colonies

Country	Colony	Major Cultural Influences
Spain	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico	Spanish language Catholic religion
France	Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique	French language Catholic religion
Great Britain	Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, British Virgin Islands	English language Protestant and Catholic religions
Netherlands	Netherlands Antilles	Dutch language Protestant religion
Denmark	Danish West Indies ¹	Danish language ² Protestant religion

¹ Became U.S. Virgin Islands in 1917. ² English is now the official language.

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

- ❶ **REGION** Which European country had the most colonies in the Caribbean?
- ❷ **PLACE** In the colonies of which European countries was the Catholic religion dominant?

A COLONIAL MOSAIC By the 19th century, the Spanish, French, British, Dutch, and Danish all claimed islands in the Caribbean. Most of the European powers were there to profit from the sugar trade. This trade depended on the forced labor of workers brought in chains from Africa.

CARIBBEAN INDEPENDENCE The first independence movement in Latin America began as a slave revolt in the Caribbean on the island of Haiti. In the 18th century, Haiti was a French colony with an important sugar industry. Africans brought to the island by force worked on the sugar plantations and other plantations. In the 1790s, Toussaint L’Ouverture (too•SAN•loo•vehr•TOOR) led a slave rebellion in Haiti and took over the government of the island. By 1804, Haiti had achieved independence from France.

Cuba achieved independence from Spain in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War. After an occupation by United States forces, the island became self-governing in 1902. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago did not achieve full independence from Great Britain until 1962.

Cultural Blends

Central America and the Caribbean are close to each other geographically, and their cultures show a blending of influences. This mixture affects everything from religion to language.

CULTURE OF CENTRAL AMERICA As you’ve read, the culture of Central America blends two major elements: Native American influences with those of Spanish settlers. The Spanish were the dominant group of European settlers in Central America—their language remains dominant in the area today. Catholicism is the major religion, although Protestant missionaries are active in the region.

The Spanish took land away from the natives of the region. The conquerors cut down forests, opened up land for grazing livestock, and introduced new crops, such as wheat. They created large farms and ranches, built towns, and moved the native peoples off the land and into the towns. All this altered the way of life in the region.

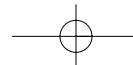
CULTURE OF THE CARIBBEAN A greater variety of influences was at work in the Caribbean. The Spanish, French, British, Danish, and Dutch existed side by side with the African and Native American. Residents of the islands are of European, African, or mixed ancestry. 

African influences were especially important. Most of the people are descendants of the African slaves brought to the islands to work on the



Making Comparisons

How does the culture of the Caribbean differ from the culture of Central America?



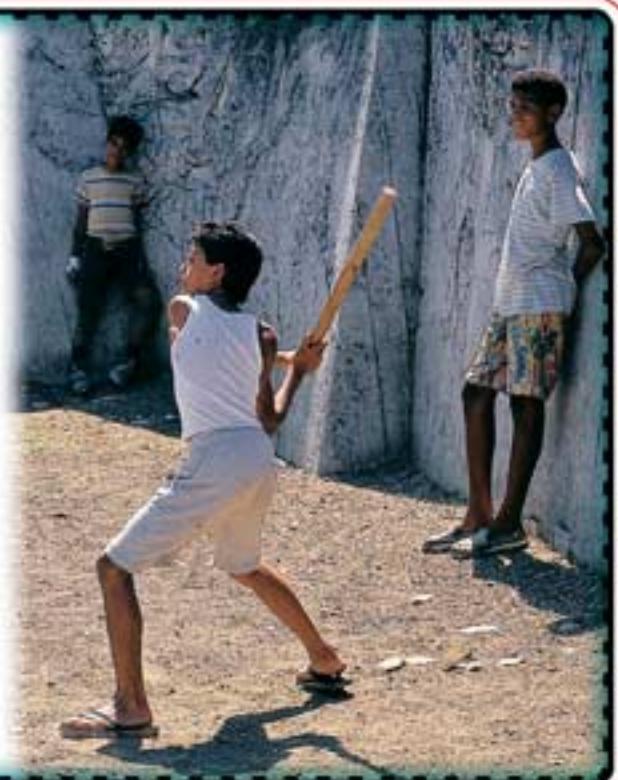
growing up in...Cuba

This boy is playing baseball, a sport as popular in Cuba as it is in the United States. Baseball traveled from the United States to Cuba in the late 1800s. Baseball is considered the island's national pastime, just as it is in the United States.

Young people in Cuba receive many benefits from the Communist government, including free education and health care. The education system extends from preschool programs through college to graduate programs. However, young people, like all Cubans, live in a police state that limits their economic and political freedoms.

If you lived in Cuba, here are some rights you would enjoy and restrictions you would face:

- You would receive a free education.
- You would receive free medical care.
- You would attend school from age 6 to somewhere between ages 11 and 15.
- You could attend free concerts, ballets, and plays.
- Your freedom of speech and writing would be restricted.
- Your economic opportunities would be very limited.



LATIN AMERICA

sugar plantations. They left a lasting mark on all aspects of culture in the islands, including village life, markets, and choice of crops.

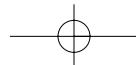
The religions of the Caribbean include Catholic and Protestant, as well as Santeria, which combines certain African practices and rituals with Catholic elements. Voodoo is practiced on the island of Haiti. Rastafarianism is a religious and political movement based in Jamaica.

Spanish is spoken on the most populous islands in the Caribbean: Cuba, with a population of about 11 million, and the Dominican Republic, with a population of about 8.5 million. There are also many French speakers (Haiti alone has a population of more than 6 million). English dominates in Jamaica, with a population of almost 3 million. There is a smattering of Dutch and Danish also spoken in the region.

Economics: Jobs and People

In general, most of the people in the countries of the region are poor. This is, in part, a legacy of colonialism. The early success of the sugar crop benefited colonial planters, not the native or African laborers. Also, the region faced competition in the sugar market, and eventually the sugar trade declined. Further, the fact that natural resources were exported and not used locally left the region economically weakened.

FARMING AND TRADE Sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean provide the region's largest export crop. Other important export crops are bananas, citrus fruits, coffee, and spices. All these crops are well adapted to the climate and soil of the region. Many people work on the plantations that grow crops for export. But the pay is poor, and as a result, average per-capita income in the Caribbean is very low.



5 THEMES

MOVEMENT

The Panama Canal

Panama is a unique crossroads, linking North America and South America and the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Before the Panama Canal was built, sea travel from the east coast to the west coast of North America meant a journey of about 15,000 miles. The canal cut the coast-to-coast journey more than in half. Now, ships move through a series of locks shown on the map at right.

Sailing through the Panama Canal from the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean, you actually sail from northwest to southeast, not from east to west.



In Central America, too, the main source of income is the commercial farming practiced on large plantations. These farms produce 10 percent of the world's coffee and 10 percent of the world's bananas. Central America's mines and forests also provide resources for export. ▶

Trade is important because of the **Panama Canal**, which cuts through the land bridge and connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Ships from both hemispheres use the canal, making Panama a crossroads of world trade. The canal made possible the exchange of both goods and ideas.

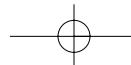
WHERE PEOPLE LIVE AND WHY Population patterns in Central America and the Caribbean are directly related to their economies. Both Central America and the Caribbean have populations of between 30 and 40 million people. But in Central America, most of the people make their living on farms and, as a result, live in rural areas.

Many of the islands in the Caribbean are densely populated. More than 11 million people live on Cuba, the largest of the islands. Most people live in urban areas, where they hope to find jobs in tourism. The cities attract people who are seeking a better way of life. Unfortunately, many end up living in slums. The region is working to find a way to channel more of the profits from tourism and farming to benefit local communities.

CONNECT TO THE ISSUES RESOURCES
What resources are exported from Central America and the Caribbean?

Popular Culture, Tourism, and Jobs

Education and jobs are a major concern to the people of Central America and the Caribbean. Music, heavily influenced and shaped by the African heritage in the region, is an important part of the popular culture of Central America and the Caribbean.



MUSIC OF THE CARIBBEAN Both reggae and calypso music started in the Caribbean. **Calypso** music began in Trinidad. Calypso combines musical elements from Africa, Spain, and the Caribbean. Calypso songs are accompanied by steel drums and guitars, and they have improvised lyrics.

Reggae developed in Jamaica in the 1960s. Many reggae songs deal with social problems and religion.



BACKGROUND

Bob Marley's son, David "Ziggy" Marley, is carrying on his father's musical legacy.

African music, Caribbean music, and American music all fed into the roots of reggae. Bob Marley of Jamaica was a pioneer of reggae. The music of the Caribbean is one of the elements that lures tourists to the region, creating jobs for local residents.

TOURISM AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY Rapid population growth in the Caribbean is contributing to high unemployment, especially among the young. Many people flee rural areas and move to the cities in search of jobs. Too often, however, they lack job skills. There are schools to help prepare students for jobs in agriculture and tourism.

Tourism is, in fact, an increasingly important industry. Local residents of the islands are able to find jobs working in the hotels, resorts, and restaurants there. In addition, people can make a living working as guides and assistants on fishing excursions, sailing trips, snorkeling adventures, hiking expeditions, and other activities for tourists.

People also find jobs in the **informal economy**, which takes place outside official channels, without benefits or protection for workers. These include jobs such as street vending, shining shoes, and a variety of other activities and services that provide people with a small income.

In Section 3, you will read about Spanish-speaking South America.

HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION Many of Bob Marley's songs reflect his faith and political beliefs.
How might popular culture express important ideas and political beliefs?



Assessment

1 Places & Terms

Identify and explain the following places and terms.

- cultural hearth
- United Provinces of Central America
- Panama Canal
- calypso
- reggae
- informal economy

2 Taking Notes

REGION Review the notes you took for this section.



- What European countries had colonies in the Caribbean?
- Which European country settled most of Central America?

3 Main Ideas

- a. What are the major groups that blended to form the culture of this region?
- b. What are some major sources of income in the economies of Central America and the Caribbean?
- c. What forms of music have evolved in the region?

4 Geographic Thinking

Drawing Conclusions How did the establishment of sugar plantations by Europeans affect the settlement of the Caribbean? **Think about:**

- the people brought in to work on the plantations



RESEARCH LINKS
CLASSZONE.COM

GeoActivity

MAKING COMPARISONS Pair with a partner and make a **poster** about the Panama Canal. Do research on the Internet and illustrate your poster with maps and diagrams of the locks in the canal. Provide statistical data about the canal that compares it with other canals, such as the Suez Canal.