

Latin American Culture

OVERVIEW:

- Latin American nations in the 20th century shared problems with Third World countries relating to matters of economic development and relations with more powerful economic societies.
 - The earlier political independence of Latin America and its Western-influenced political and social structures gave it distinct characteristics.
- Their economies, dependent upon Western investment and exports, were vulnerable to fluctuations in the world system.
- Economic dependency accompanied political and cultural dependency in national life.
 - Latin Americans struggled to gain social justice, cultural autonomy, and economic security through either adopting foreign ideologies or formulating indigenous responses.
 - Although agricultural and mineral production continued, industrial development increased worker organization, immigration and urban growth.
 - An urban middle class appeared to join the political process.
- Economic expansion and preservation of the political status quo alternated with crisis periods when efforts were made break or political patterns and provide social justice.
- Despite the surface changes Latin America remained relatively unchanged as old institutions adapted to new influences.
- Very few revolutions resulted in marked political changes, but there have been significant alterations in social and economic matters.
- Latin America was a vigorous contributor to the global culture in the twentieth century.
 - In architecture, great contribution to modern architecture and urban planning were made in the building of Brasilia.
 - In art, there were the great muralists Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera.
 - In literature, Latin American writers earned worldwide recognition with their novels that used fantasy and stark realism to depict the Latin American reality.
 - In theology, the increasing social commentary of the Catholic Church's call for social responsibility came to be known as Liberation Theology.

Ideology and Social Reform

- By the 1930s the failure of liberalism in solving societal problems was apparent → Latin America's middle class had entered politics, but only in alliance with the existing oligarchy or the military.
- Liberalism's concepts simply were not suited to Latin American economic and social reality. Intellectuals began to look into their own cultures for solutions and lost faith in Western democracy.
- Socialist and communist parties formed.
- Criticism also came from a church opposed to the secularization brought by capitalism.

Populist Politics - The Case of Peru

- Peru, with a predominantly Indian population, typified the ferment:
 - dependence on the export of primary products; foreign control of transportation and industry;
 - government was corrupt;
 - elites profited from the system while peasants were landless.
- Ongoing criticism of the system led to the formation of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) in 1924. The party **drew inspiration from the Mexican revolution, socialism, nationalism, and Mussolini's fascism.**
 - represented the new populist groups that mobilized mass support among urban and rural populations under the direction of personalist leaders who often were military or

elite politicians. Once in power they often did not challenge the existing structure of government.

The Vargas Regime in Brazil

- launched a centralized political program, prevented coups by communists and fascists, and with military support imposed a new constitution in 1937 that created an authoritarian regime based on ideas from Mussolini's Italy.
- Little open opposition was allowed to his corporatist government.
- was deposed by the military in 1945 but returned to the presidency in 1950 with support of labor and the left.
- Vargas, under criticism from right and left, committed suicide in 1954; he since has become a nationalist hero.

Argentina: Populism, Perón, and the Military

- In 1943 the military, nationalists who wanted to modernize the state, seized control. Juan D. Perón emerged as leader, gaining support by supporting worker demands. His wife Eva Duarte - Evita - became his spokesperson among the lower classes.
- Perón created a coalition embracing workers, industrialists, and the military, depending upon his personal charisma and repression to maintain rule.
- Foreign owned industries were nationalized.
- His coalition fell apart and a military coup drove him from office in 1955. The country remained under his shadow for the next 20 years as military governments attempted to solve economic and political problems.
- He was elected president in 1973, but his death in 1974 returned Argentina to military rule.

Radical Options in the 1950s

- There were other responses to the problems of Latin American countries, but disagreement remained on how to improve economic and social conditions.
 - Mexico continued one-party rule; the conservative PRI sacrificed social justice to economic growth.
 - In Venezuela and Costa Rica reform, reform-minded governments triumphed in open elections.
 - Others turned to Marxist socialism as a guide and became caught up in cold war struggles -- some radical and revolutionary solutions were attempted.

Guatemala: Reform and United States Intervention

- In 1944 a middle class and labor coalition elected Juan José Arevalo as president. Arevalo's reforms and nationalism led to conflict with foreign interests, especially the United Fruit Company.
- In 1951 the more radical Jacobo Arbenz was elected president → His reformist programs the U.S. government to impose economic and diplomatic restrictions on Guatemala.
- In 1954 the CIA assisted military opponents to overthrow Arbenz and under the new government reform ceased.
- Continued violence and political instability followed.

The Search for Reform and the Military Option

- The clergy was divided politically, although many priests became activists for social justice. Liberation Theology combined Catholic doctrines and socialist principles to improve life for the poor.

Soldiers Take Power

- The Cuban Revolution worried individuals fearing reform within a communist system. As the military became more professionalized, soldiers adopted a creed that made them the true representatives of the nation. During the 1960s they intervened directly in politics.
 - Soldiers took over in Brazil in 1964, in Argentina in 1966, and in 1973 the military in Chile overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende.
 - Similar coups occurred in Uruguay in 1973 and Peru in 1968.
- The soldiers imposed bureaucratic authoritarian regimes that were supposed to provide economic stability by submerging selfish interests.
- The military controlled policy and resorted to repression and torture.
- Economic policies fell heaviest on workers since any economic development came at their cost. Basic structural problems persisted.

The New Democratic Trend

- By the mid-1980s some military governments were returned to civilian control. Continued economic problems and growing internal dissent contributed to the change.
- Fears of populist or communist movements declined.
- The democratization process was not easy or universal.
 - Uneasy truces continued between governments and former rebels in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.
 - The United States demonstrated its power by invading Panama.
- Latin American governments continued to face major problems.
 - Large foreign loans had produced a massive debt burden.
 - High inflation provoked social instability, while compensatory programs had social and political costs.
 - The international drug trade created cartels that threatened or corrupted national governments.
- Still, by the 1990s, it appeared that democratic trends were well-established.