General World Cultures

Chapter 7- Mexico

**irrigation**- the watering of dry farm land by means of ditches or pipes

**civilization**- a high level of culture that includes writing

**empire**-a group of countries or cultures under a single ruler

**pyramid**- a structure with a square base and four triangle-shaped sides that rise to a point

**staple**- a main food eaten by people

**colony**- a territory owned and governed by another country

**mestizo**- a person who has both Spanish and American Indian ancestry

**hacienda**- in Latin America, a large estate or ranch

**ejido**- a communal farm in Mexico, on which farmers either work the land together or individually

\* Mexico is located just south of the United States. It is part of Latin America, a region that includes North, Central, and South America. Mexico is a large country divided into 31 states. See how many you can name in two minutes. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Mexico is almost three times the size of Texas. The nation’s capital is Mexico City. Like Washington, D.C., Mexico City is a separate district, and not part of a state. About 1 out of every ten of the 100,000,000 people live in the capital.

\* The Sierra Madre mountain chain runs along the east coast. The Sierra Madre Mountains also run along the west coast. Between them is the Central Plateau, where the soil is rich but the water is scarce. Farmers there depend on **irrigation** to grow corn, wheat, and rice. The southern part of Mexico gets more rain. Areas in the south that are near the Gulf of Mexico are especially moist. There, Mexican farmers grow crops such as coffee, sugar cane, oranges, and pineapples. Agriculture is an important part of the Mexican economy.

\* The Central Plateau is dotted with volcanoes. Ash and rock from these volcanoes cover the land. The ash and rock erode and mix with the soil. Do you think this is good or bad for the soil? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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The volcanic ash and rock actually contain the minerals that plants need to grow. As a result, the soil from Mexico is good for growing crops.

\* Volcanoes in Mexico also bring minerals such as silver, gold, copper, and lead close to the surface. In addition, Mexico has offshore oil in the Gulf of Mexico and natural gas inland. Mexico sells some of these fossil fuels to other countries and keep some for use at home.

\* Other resources include warm weather and good beaches, as well as the many ruins of ancient cities. These draw tourists from around the world. The tourist trade creates jobs for builders, hotel workers, tour guides, and many others.

Complete Mexico Map Study on page 89.

**The Ancient Aztecs**

\* The earliest people in Mexico were bands of Native American hunters. They drifted south more than 10,000 years ago. Some of them settled in the Central Plateau and began farming there. They were the first farmers in North America. By 3500 B.C., they were growing squash, corn, and beans. Over time, the great **civilizations** of the Olmecs developed.

\* Other civilizations in the Central Plateau were the Zapotecs and the Toltecs. In the southwestern part of Mexico, the Maya built great temple-cities. In central Mexico, the Aztecs rose to power.

\* Shortly after A.D. 1300, the Aztecs, once a small roving group, grew in population after settling a=on an island in the middle of the lake. There, they built a large city. They began to conquer other Native American groups. Within a hundred years, the Aztecs ruled an **empire** that spread over hundreds of miles.

\* The Aztecs grew to some 300,000. Stone ditches brought fresh water to the city. A network of canals served the streets. There were buildings, schools, a market, and a zoo. At the center of the city was a large, flat-topped **pyramid**. It had two small temples at the top. The pyramid was used for religious ceremonies. The Aztecs worshipped the sun.

In the early 1500s, the Spaniards destroyed the Aztec empire and civilization. Traces of the Aztecs still remain, however. In fact, Mexico gets its name from the Aztecs, as Mexica was another name for the Aztecs. Aztec ruins still stand in Mexico. About a million people still speak a dialect of their language. We will now Google search the Aztec ruins.

\* Symbols used by the Aztecs are seen throughout modern Mexico. For example, Mexico’s flag shows and eagle holding a snake. This image comes from an Aztec legend that tells how the site of their city was chosen. According to this legend, an Aztec priest saw an eagle eating a snake. The eagle was the Aztec symbol for the sun god.

\* The Aztecs borrowed much of their culture from other people. Corn became a **staple** throughout Central and South America from this. What are some staples of the American culture (not just your own diet)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**A Spanish Colony**

In the 1500s, a Spaniard named Hernando Cortez heard stories that there was gold in the land of the Aztecs. Supposedly, Mr. Cutright is descended from him. Our name went from Cortez to Cortright to Cutright. It changed over time due to religious persecution. Cortez gathered about 600 soldiers and sailed to Mexico. He ordered his men to burn ships so that they had no choice but to follow him. Cortez then led his men in a war against Aztecs- and won.

How do you think the Spaniards won a war against an empire (enough to conquer!).

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\* They had guns that the Aztecs did not. The Aztec religion predicted an angry god would attack them. They mistook the Spaniards as the gods. The horses also frightened the people as they had not seen such large animals. There are still some tribes that do not have exposure to the world! <http://www.cracked.com/article_19976_6-isolated-groups-who-had-no-idea-that-civilization-existed.html>

Most important, Cortez got help from other Native Americans in this area. The Native American nations hated the Aztecs because the Aztecs had used their people as victims for human sacrifice. They were glad to help Cortez. The Spaniards then built their own city at the same spot. This is where modern Mexico City now sits.

\* Disease made the conquest easier (it only took a few years). The Spaniards brought smallpox with them. Nearly 95% of the native population died over the next 80 years. Disease caused most of this damage.

\* Mexico became a **colony** of Spain. Spaniards owned all of the land. Do you feel like you own the land that your house is on? What about property that nobody owns? Who should have the rights to this land? Defend your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Native Americans became enslaved and were tied to the land. They had no power, no wealth, and no rights (sound familiar??). Mexico remained a Spanish colony for about 300 years. During that time, Spaniards married and had children. These children are considered **mestizo**. Today, about 60% of the population is mestizo.

**An Independent Mexico**

\* In 1997, a hundred Mexican pesos were worth just under $80. In 2000, the same amount of money was worth $11. Thus, the economy of Mexico nearly collapsed.

\* In 1821, Mexico became independent of Spain. In 1876, Porfirio Diaz became president and stayed in power for 30 years. Diaz brought Mexico into the modern world by inviting companies from the U.S. and Europe into Mexico. The companies built railroads, power plants, and factories. They ended up controlling much of Mexico’s economy.

**Modern Mexico**

\* A revolution and constitution brought many changes. Until the revolution, most of the land belonged to a few rich people and to the Catholic Church. They became large estates known as **haciendas**. Poor farmers did the work. When crops were sold, the landowners kept the money.

\* Mexico’s constitution gave the Mexicans the right to free speech. It allowed them to form political parties. It started land reform, which may have been the most important change. The government took land away from the richest landowners and broke it up to form **ejidos**. Under this system, farmers either worked together or gained rights to farm their own land.

\* Land reform did not prevent Mexico from remaining a poor country. It has valuable resources, but many people cannot earn a living- due on part to a rapidly growing population. The country cannot grow enough food to feed all of its people. That is a reason why many Mexican citizens want to migrate to the U.S. to look for jobs.

Do you think the U.S. should set up factories in other countries (like Mexico)?

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\* At the same time, many U.S. businesses are moving factories to other countries (like Mexico) for various reasons. Wages and labor costs are cheaper. The U.S. companies bring in raw materials and hire Mexican workers to make clothing, toys, tools, and high-tech TV’s and answering machines. Factories provide the jobs so that Mexican citizens may stay in their country.

\* Industry presents problems. Towns are crowded. Water, electricity, and sewer services are poor. Waste water pollutes the Rio Grande along the Texas border.

\* Overpopulation is another problem in Mexico. It is the world’s second most populous area, with about 17 million people. By 2025, it is estimated to have 30 million people. Almost 2,000 people per day are going there/being born. Much of this is migration. People are moving there from rural areas. The come because they do not have land and/or cannot find work.

\* Jobs are scarce. Almost 50% of Mexican adults are out of work. Only 7% of Americans are out of work. Disease travels quickly in crowded places. Clean water is scarce. There is not enough room for the city’s garbage.

\* The Roman Catholic Church is very prevalent in Mexico. The church owned a great deal of land. This angered many Mexicans although they remained faithful Catholics. Reforms and revolution cut the power of the Church in Mexico. The Church was no longer allowed to own land. Free public schools were set up as an alternative to Catholic schools.

**The Arts in Mexico**

\* In Mexico, the heritage of the past lives on through the arts. Native American heritage is seen through the architecture. Murals, or large paintings on walls of buildings, are made to show the culture. Common people were often pictured as heroes in these murals.

*Complete the Global Issues Smog article on page 97*