

# Facing Challenges Together

## Passage - Life in Latin America

---

AS YOU READ, CONSIDER HOW THIS PASSAGE HELPS YOU ANSWER THE FOCUS QUESTION:

*In what ways is the richness of Latin American culture the product of many diverse influences?*

---

Written by R. Anthony Kugler

For much of the twentieth century, the small Latin American nation of Honduras seemed to have escaped the world's notice being wedged against the Caribbean Sea by El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Its rugged mountains, dense jungles, and swampy coastlines sheltered and isolated its people.

When Spanish sailors under Christopher Columbus reached Honduras in 1502, they found several flourishing communities of native people, the most powerful of whom were the Maya. Relations between the Europeans and the Mayas were troubled from the start, but not even violence (and there was a great deal of it) could prevent a constant exchange of goods and ideas. Though the Maya civilization is now lost, the effects of this interaction continue to shape Honduran society. Today, for example, nearly every Honduran understands Spanish, although some prefer to speak one of several native languages, and more than 80 percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic branch of Christianity—another import from Spain. Additionally, after centuries of intermarriage, the majority of today's roughly nine million Hondurans are *mestizos*—that is, they are of mixed Spanish and native ancestry. Small groups of natives remain, particularly in the northeastern jungles, but improvements in communication and transportation, as well as widespread deforestation, threaten to overwhelm their distinct ways of life.

The larger population faces many problems, too—the most serious of these being poverty. Hondurans farm plots of land that are far too small to feed their families. Surprisingly, the problem is much worse today, for there are many more mouths to feed; the growth rate of Honduras's population has long been one of the highest in the world. Frustrated by the lack of opportunities in the countryside, many Hondurans have moved to Tegucigalpa, the nation's capital, and other major cities. Unfortunately, good jobs are just as equally hard to find in these urban areas, and the living conditions are often much worse. There is little money for schools and hospitals, and crime is increasing.

Despite these ever increasing problems, Honduras continues to be a remarkable and notable nation. Unlike its neighbors Nicaragua and El Salvador, Honduras has not suffered a civil war. Tensions certainly exist between different groups, and they occasionally lead to violence. So far, however, Hondurans have managed to ease these tensions with communication, particularly in the pages of their daily newspapers.

# Facing Challenges Together

## Passage - Life in Latin America

---

Hondurans are proud that their nation places far fewer restrictions on the press than others do.

Equally important is the nation's long tradition of building local grassroots organizations. Honduras supports hundreds of these groups, which range from neighborhood anticrime associations to tree-planting societies to labor unions. Many grew out of the nation's experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when corrupt politicians and powerful international corporations seemed to have an iron grip on the nation's future. But the people of Honduras, remembering their proud declaration of independence from Spain in 1821, refused to give up their hard-won freedom. Instead, they started to organize. In 1920, for example, thousands of workers went on strike to protest their treatment at the hands of the Standard Fruit Company, an American business that controlled the nation's critically important banana crop and much of its land. Although the company's offer of a wage increase eventually ended the strike, the presence of this foreign business and others remains controversial.

The banana crop is still important to the economy, but there is now an even more powerful symbol of the country's role in international trade—the factories owned by foreign corporations. Dozens of them have been built in the past few decades, providing thousands of jobs for people who need them. For many Hondurans, however, the factories have been a disappointment since the country continues to struggle under the burden of poverty. If and when that burden is lifted, the victory will belong not to a foreign business but to the proud Honduran people.

## Honduras Through Time

### **About 1800 BCE – 250 CE**

Maya village life begins along the Pacific Coast. The first Maya villages in the lowland rain forest are built in 1000 BCE.

### **About 250 – 1200 CE**

The Classic-era Maya flourish in the lowlands between 250 and 800 CE. Pyramid building begins in the lowlands in 300 CE.

### **About 1200 – 1524 CE**

New Maya states in northern Yucatán and southern highlands are founded. The Maya first come into contact with Spaniards around 1500 CE.

### **1502 CE**

# Facing Challenges Together

## Passage - Life in Latin America

---

Columbus lands on the coast of Honduras, and it falls under the rule of Spain for three centuries.

### **1821 CE**

Honduras declares its independence from Spain and joins the Central American Federation.

### **1838 CE**

The Central American Federation dissolves, and Honduras becomes an autonomous state.

### **1899 CE**

The first banana concession opens. Later Honduras is known as a “banana republic” for all the bananas it exports and the predominant role of foreign businesses in its political life.

### **1932 – 1948 CE**

Dictator Tiburcio Carias Andino rules Honduras.

### **1950s CE**

Honduras signs a military treaty with the United States to protect its interests.

### **1969 CE**

The Football War is fought with El Salvador.

### **1980s CE**

Honduras experiences a decade of political and economic unrest.

### **1982 CE**

The Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve on the Mosquito Coast is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### **1988 CE**

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights finds the Honduran military guilty of killing citizens.

# Facing Challenges Together

## Passage - Life in Latin America

---

### **1993 CE**

Human rights violations by the military are investigated.

### **1998 CE**

Hurricane Mitch destroys much of Honduras and devastates its economy.

### **2000 CE**

Mexico and Honduras sign a free-trade agreement.

### **2006 CE**

Manuel Zelaya of the Liberal Party becomes president.

### **2007 CE**

President Zelaya goes to Cuba and establishes maritime boundaries despite previous disagreements between the two countries.

### **2009 CE**

President Manuel Zelaya is forced into exile after being forcefully removed from office by the military.

### **2012 CE**

Honduras citizens march through the streets to protest the deaths of dozens of journalists who had been killed in the last three years.

### **2015 CE**

Tens of thousands of Hondurans gather to demand the current President Juan Orlando Hernandez's resignation after rumors that millions of dollars were stolen from the country's public health system to fund his election campaign in 2013.

### **2017 November CE**

Juan Orlando Hernandez is reelected president.

#### **Credits**

R. Anthony Kugler, "Honduras: Facing Challenges Together," Faces, November 2006. © Carus Publishing Company. Reproduced with permission.