

Name _____ Date _____

Latin American Revolutions

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

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Born in 1783 to an aristocratic family of Spanish descent, Simón Bolívar enjoyed a privileged upbringing in Venezuela, then a colony of Spain. As a boy, he was educated by private tutors who introduced him to rationalist thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. At 16, Bolívar was sent to Europe to continue his studies, as was tradition for wealthy young men of his era. There, he delved deeper into the writings of Enlightenment philosophers, prompting him to question Spain's monarchical colonial rule of his homeland and envision a future of liberal democracy. Soon after, he vowed to do whatever it would take to free his country.

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In 1807, Bolívar returned to Venezuela and joined the burgeoning independence movement. He quickly became a prominent political and military leader, helping to expel Venezuela's Spanish governor in 1810. The young republic was quickly reconquered, but Bolívar's forces took the Spanish by surprise in a series of daring attacks. This campaign eventually secured independence for northern South America, now Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama. Bolívar went on to assist other revolutionaries in liberating Peru and creating a league of Hispanic American states. But the leaders of these new countries didn't always see eye to eye, and when war broke out between them, Bolívar exiled himself to Europe. He died en route in 1830.

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Notes

Like many revolutions, the 1910 uprising in Mexico was led by people with competing political beliefs. Francisco Madero, whose provocative treatises against the country's tyrannical president are credited with sparking the revolutionary movement, was a wealthy businessman and landowner. While he sought democratic reforms such as term limits on the presidency, Madero did not believe in the more radical changes proposed by leftist revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata. Zapata, who hailed from a peasant background, was strongly opposed to the hacienda system that characterized Mexican life at the time. He and his followers called for these large estates to be broken up and redistributed to the peasantry.

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While Madero and Zapata were originally allies, these ideological differences ultimately turned them into enemies. Zapata's guerrilla forces were crucial to the defeat of the authoritarian government, but when Madero assumed the presidency, he dismissed them as mere bandits. Infuriated by this denouncement, Zapata released his own treatise condemning Madero and his failure to implement land reform. Madero responded ruthlessly, ordering his generals to burn villages and imprison peasants in an effort to root out the Zapatistas. These cruel tactics garnered popular support for Zapata, and in the wake of Madero's overthrow, he was able to implement land reform in his home state of Morelos. His agrarian demands were also addressed in the 1917 constitution, which allowed the government to seize privately held lands for communal use.

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The rise of Fidel Castro marked a radical shift in Cuban society and the beginning of decades of mass emigration. From 1959 to 1974, more than 500,000 Cubans left their home country for the United States. Fearing reprisal from the new regime, wealthy landowners and members of the former Batista administration were the first to flee. Eager to demonstrate their opposition to the communist government, American officials initially welcomed Cuban refugees with open arms. In fact, the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act offered permanent residency to any Cuban who had lived in the US for at least a year, an unprecedented gesture toward any immigrant group.

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Subsequent waves of immigrants did not receive the same warm welcome. In 1980, more than 125,000 Cubans made the 90-mile journey to Florida. These refugees were much less affluent than those who had previously settled in the US. Their escape and resettlement were handled almost entirely by the Cuban American community, who volunteered their own boats to transport refugees. In the decades to come, tens of thousands would attempt to cross the ocean on homemade vessels, only to be turned away.

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