

Name _____ Date _____

Modern Latin America

"These Streets"

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.

1. After the conquistadors defeated the Incan and Aztec Empires, settlers began immigrating to the New World to set up societies. While the Native Americans were being ravaged by disease, the Europeans and their descendants were organizing governments and colonies. Just like the colonists in North America, the people in Latin America began to question rule from abroad. By the mid-1800s, the Latin American countries were independent from Europe. And for the next 200 years, Latin America would struggle with how to handle the power. When they succeeded, they would flourish; when they failed, millions of citizens would suffer. This tug-of-war was a time known as the postcolonial era, simply meaning "after colonialism."

Notes

2. The first colony in Latin America to gain freedom was Haiti. It had previously been a French colony called St. Domingue. In 1791, while the ruling class of St. Domingue was busy worrying about the French Revolution, the slaves took advantage of the squabbling and revolted. Under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, the slaves managed to overthrow the government. In 1804, Haiti was declared a free country.

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Other countries also took advantage of European distraction to break free. After the French Revolution, Emperor Napoleon was stomping all over Europe. He had invaded Spain and Portugal. In Mexico in 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rallied Native Americans and mestizos, or people of mixed Native American and Spanish heritage, to fight for independence. They lost, and Hidalgo was executed, but the spirit of revolution began to spread. In 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain when a Creole named Vicente Guerrero, who had been charged with killing revolutionaries, decided to unite with them instead.

3. Even though Mexico became independent in 1821, people of Spanish origin still held most of the power. In fact, even though they were only one percent of the population, they owned 85 percent of the land! These rich estates were known as haciendas. The wealthy people ruthlessly stole almost all the land from the natives and mestizos. Under the independent power, the new improvements really only benefited rich people.

Emiliano Zapata led a group of peasants in revolt against this new, unequal independence in 1910. He wanted to return the land to peasants, so he led the burning of hacienda buildings to bring them back to traditional communities. Francisco "Pancho" Villa also led revolts against the haciendas, though he didn't burn them. Zapata and Villa gained many followers, but the Creole landowners had control of the cities. They eventually killed Zapata and Villa. The landowners knew that they couldn't continue to rule without winning more support from the people, so they gave back a little bit of land. The vast majority of Mexicans remained poor.

Notes

4. Before the Great Depression, Argentina was making lots of money from meat production. But when the Depression hit, the people turned to authoritarian leadership. The military general Juan Perón took power after World War II. His wife Eva Perón was quite popular, and while she was alive, Perón enjoyed much support. She was especially popular with poor workers known as the descamisados, or "shirtless ones." But a popular leader with a pretty face can distract from the abuses behind the scenes. During Perón's dictatorship, which lasted until his death, he supported the "Dirty War," in which the government sponsored the killing of up to 30,000 people who opposed government views. The people who were killed were known as the "disappeared," since they were taken out of their homes or off the street by secret police and never heard from again. It is assumed that the government killed them. Finally, in 1983 a civilian government was reinstated.

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5. During the Cold War (about 1947-1991), the United States and the USSR were the two global superpowers, bent on each other's destruction. They basically asked all the other countries in the world to pick a side. Communist, or left wing, governments gained the powerful support of the Soviets. Governments that leaned more toward capitalist, or right wing policies, were supported by the United States. Whether they were communist or not, postcolonial Latin American governments had some ruthless and violent leaders.

To fight against the Soviet Union, the United States actively intervened in communist Latin American countries like Cuba, which was led by Fidel Castro and ridden with corruption, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Chile. For the United States, communist equaled "evil." But it wasn't so simple. The United States supported parties who wanted to kick the communists out of power. But the United States found itself supporting some ruthless dictators just because they weren't communists.

6. Militant dictators had control of Guatemala until the 1950s. One dictator was Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. He had enacted land reforms that were communist in nature, and the United States was strongly anti-communist. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped to overthrow him in 1954. But this coup was followed by decades of violence under the leadership of a military junta. The Guatemalans only began to have a democratic government in 1996, and there is still a strong military force there. Many blame the United States for their role in these events.

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President Ronald Reagan

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The most controversial United States intervention happened in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan Somoza family held control of the country until 1979. That year, a group called the Sandinistas revolted against the government. They were very far left and connected to Cuba and the USSR; these countries

actually supplied their weapons. The United States supported an anti-communist group called the Contras, who fought against the Sandinistas for power.

In 1983, Congress said that President Reagan couldn't support the Contras anymore, but the United States continued to supply them with weapons secretly by sending the weapons to Iran, who then shipped them over to the Contras. This was during the Iran-Iraq war, and it became known as the Iran-Contra Affair. The Contras and Sandinistas reached a peace treaty in 1987, though, and there has been a moderate government in place since then.

Notes

8. Like Argentina, Brazil also turned to dictatorship after the Great Depression. Their dictator was Getúlio Vargas. He didn't start out as a tyrant, but eventually he turned Brazil into a fascist state. Fascism is the most extreme form of conservative government. Vargas ruled until 1945 as the poor lived in favelas, or slums. Upon his overthrow, Brazil slowly returned to a democratic rule.

Civil war broke out in El Salvador in 1979 between left wing and right wing guerilla fighters. The right wing fighters had United States support. The war ended years later, after 75,000 people had been killed. Finally, in 1992, the two sides signed a peace treaty.

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