Chapter 8: Central America and the Caribbean

Unit 3
Section 1: Physical Geography
Landforms

- Pacific Lowlands
  - Guatemala to Panama
- Caribbean Lowlands
  - Nicaragua and Honduras
- Central Highlands
  - Mountains
  - Volcanoes
Landforms

- Isthmus of Panama
  - Isthmus—narrow strip of land connecting 2 larger land areas
  - Connects North and South America
  - Separates the Caribbean Sea from the Gulf of Panama
Landforms

• Caribbean:
  – 7,000 islands
  – Greater Antilles and Lesser Antilles
    • Archipelago—group or chain of islands
  – Tectonic activity: earthquakes are common
Water Systems

• Water systems in this region provide:
  – Transportation
  – Drinking water
  – Drainage
  – Irrigation
  – Hydroelectric power

• Lake Nicaragua is Central America’s largest freshwater lake
  – Only one in the world to have sharks, swordfish, and tarpon
Water Systems

• Panama Canal
  – Bisects the Isthmus of Panama
  – One of the most important man-made waterways
  • Why???
Climate, Biomes, and Resources

• High temperatures and abundant rainfall are common year-round for much of the region
• Tropical rain forest climate
  – Diversity of species
    • Trees, ferns, mosses
    • Birds, bats, insects
    • Costa Rica and Panama are global biodiversity hotspots
Climate, Biomes, and Resources

- Tropical Wet/Dry Climate
  - Caribbean islands
  - Areas exposed to wind experience high temperatures and lots of rainfall
  - Areas not exposed to wind experience high temperatures and rainfall, but, also have a dry season
- Grasslands
- Hurricanes common from June to November
Section 2: Human Geography
History and Government

- Central America and the Caribbean were mainly colonized by the Spanish
- Found wealth through gold, pearls, eventually slaves
- Lots of war, conquering, violence, and bloodshed between different Europeans and indigenous peoples
History and Government

- Eventually, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal all established colonies in the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas.
- Mid-1600s: forced labor, starvation, and disease had destroyed many of the native peoples.
  - Slaves from Africa were brought in.
History and Government

• Late 1700s: Africans and indigenous people started to organize and rebel
  – Francois Toussaint-Louverture was a soldier born to enslaved parents; led a revolt in Haiti
• 1804: Haiti had won its independence from France
• Most other colonies in the Caribbean did not gain independence until the 1900s
History and Government

• 1900s:
  – Central American and Caribbean countries faced political, social, and economic upheaval
  – Rich got richer, average citizen received nothing
  – Cuba 1959: revolution lead to a communist state
    • Fidel Castro ruled until 2008
    • Raul Castro now has control
Society and Culture Today

- Latin America is so diverse because it’s history includes the merging of indigenous, European, African, and Asian cultures
- Central America: most countries speak Spanish
- Caribbean: Dutch, English, French, and Spanish
  - Creole
Society and Culture Today

• Religion:
  – Central America: 80% Roman Catholic
  – Caribbean: Catholic (French and Spanish), Protestant (English), Hinduism, Islam, indigenous, African, etc.

• Health care and education varies depending on the wealth of the country and the people
Economic Activities

• Latifundia—large agricultural estates owned by families/corporations
  – Commercial agriculture
• Manifundia—small farms that produce food mainly for family use
  – Subsistence agriculture
• Cottage industry—business that employs workers in their homes
• Ecotourism—business of recreational travel based on concern for the environment
Section 3: Human-Environment Interaction
Managing Resources

• Water shortages
  – Access to clean water
• Protecting and managing wetlands
• Hydroelectric power
• Slash-and-burn farming
  – Deforestation vs. reforestation