A Magnificent Blend!

The people and cultures of Latin America are an interesting blend of the native groups in the region and influences of the countries that established colonies there. Language is the major factor that links together all the countries of the area and makes it a culture region. Because most of the countries in Latin America were conquered by Spain, the Spanish language is the most-spoken language of the region. Since Portugal claimed Brazil, Brazilians speak the Portuguese language.

After Spanish settlers moved into Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, ethnic groups began to blend. Spanish people married American Indians. Their offspring were called mestizos, or people of mixed European and Indian ancestry. Soon, black slaves from Africa were brought to Latin America. When they married Europeans, their offspring were known as mulattoes, or people of mixed black and European descent.

The major religion in Latin America is Catholicism—again, brought by the European settlers. Many of the customs in the region reflect a mixture of ancient Indian and European traditions.

Fascinating Fact

Mestizos are the largest population group in Mexico and many countries in northern South America.

Cause and Effect

Match the cause on the left to the effect on the right.

1. Spain and Portugal observe Catholic religion  
   a. culture region
2. Countries conquered by Spain  
   b. mulattoes
3. Same language in many countries  
   c. Spanish language
4. Europeans marry black Africans  
   d. Latin America is predominantly Catholic
5. Europeans marry American Indians  
   e. mestizos
A New Religion, A New Language

The Spanish and Portuguese settlers had a tremendous influence on the languages and religions of Latin America. Over time, they replaced native tongues with their Spanish and Portuguese languages, and replaced religious practices of idol worship and human sacrifice with the Catholic religion.

Think how hard communication must have been in the early days between settlers and natives who spoke many different languages! (Do you think they used hand gestures?)

The Catholic Church played a major role in expanding the Spanish language as well as expanding its religion. In Mexico, and later in California, Catholic priests established missions. These were church outposts where Indians learned the Spanish language and the Spanish way of life. Sometimes, the natives accepted Christianity easily. At other times, they rebelled against it. But over time, the Spanish language and Catholic religion led to a new culture in Latin America.

In Brazil, Portuguese became the new language, and the Catholic religion became the new religion.

Today, Spanish is the primary language of Latin America; Portuguese remains the official language of Brazil; and Catholicism is still the most widespread religion in the region. The influence of those Spanish and Portuguese settlers lives on today!

**True or False**

Write T for True and F for False.

1. Spanish is the primary language of Latin America.

2. Spanish is the official language of Brazil.

3. Very few people follow the Catholic religion in Latin America.

4. Catholic priests helped expand the Spanish language by teaching Spanish to the Indians.

5. Spanish and Portuguese settlers had little influence on the culture of Latin America today.

**Research It**

Spanish is in second place as the most-spoken language in the world. What language is in first place?