History of Latin America: Ancient Civilizations and European Colonization

Inca, Aztec, and Mayan
At the height of its existence the Inca Empire was the largest nation on Earth and remains the largest native state to have existed in the western hemisphere.

Located in the Andes Mountains – from Ecuador to Chile.
Economy

- Based primarily on farming
- Terrace farming made agriculture in the Andes possible
Ruins at Machu Picchu

Photos by Linda Hammon
Society

- The Inca had a very advanced road system
- The people traveled by foot from village to village
- Lived in clans
- Calendar based on the sun and moon
- Very skilled artisans
- Highly organized government
Major Accomplishments

- Irrigation systems
- System of language
- Domesticated the llama and alpaca
  - Used for clothing
Maya Civilization

- Located in Central America and southern Mexico
Economy

- Based on trade and agriculture
Accomplishments

- Architecture – step pyramid
- Hieroglyphics
- Fully developed written language
- Astronomy
Calendar... The Mayans did not predict the end of the world in 2012...

- Mayan were skilled mathematicians.
- Invented a 360 day calendar – very similar to the one we use today.
- Their calendar did not predict the end of the world. The calendar cycle simply ended.
Aztec Civilization

- Located in Central and Southern Mexico
Economy

- Based on agriculture, fishing, and trade
- Capital city – Tenochtitlan was built on an island in the middle of a lake – Now the center of modern Mexico City
Accomplishments

- Credited for the discovery of chocolate
  - Cacao beans were more valuable than gold – acquired through trade
- Advanced political system with an emperor
Colonization

- Treaty of Tordesillas (1494): Split newly discovered territory between Spain & Portugal at about 22 degrees west

- By the end of the 16th century, LA colonized – mostly along the coastlines
European Exploration

- “God, Gold, and Glory” were motivations
- Diseases brought by the Europeans wiped out many of the indigenous
- Intermixing common
  - European colonists + indigenous = mestizo
  - African + indigenous = mulatto
- Europeans/Whites were the largest single group
European culture still seen in LA today

- Languages = Spanish & Portuguese
- Portuguese is spoken only in Brazil
- Most Latin Americans are Christians, mostly Roman Catholic
- Economy still oriented toward export
Spanish heritage is strong in the Andean Nations as is the Indian (Inca) heritage.