

## Major Cities

The following are just a few examples of the diverse and unique cities found in Latin America:

**M**exico City—With approximately 20 million inhabitants (25 percent of Mexico's total population), Mexico City has grown to be the largest city in the world today and the political, economic, financial, cultural, and industrial center upon which the rest of the country depends. It is home to a majority of Mexico's most dynamic industries including the steel, pharmaceutical, automobile, chemical, and textile industries. The capital city also contains several museums considered to be among the best in the world, namely the National Museum of Anthropology and the newly-constructed Templo Mayor Museum. In addition, Mexico City claims to have the oldest university in the Western Hemisphere, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, founded in 1551. Yet at the same time, in the *ciudades nuevas* of Mexico City, many basic services are seriously lacking, making living conditions there some of the poorest in all of Mexico.

**Brasilia**—Not only is Brasilia the capital of Brazil, it is a unique example of nationalistic development efforts by the government. In 1956, the Brazilian Congress approved President Juscelino Kubitschek's plan to move the capital from the coastal city of Rio de Janeiro to the interior state of Goias. The plan was strongly nationalistic because it intended to develop the untapped resources of the interior, to shift the population to areas other than the coast, and to unite the interests of coastal inhabitants with those of the interior. Located in the northwestern part of the Brazilian Highlands,

Brasilia's primary function is political. With a population of just over 246,000, the majority of Brasilia's inhabitants work for the federal government. (The country's industrial might is centered in the southeastern city of Sao Paulo.) Other residents include workers who were brought in to build Brasilia but who could never afford to leave and now continue to live on the outskirts in the capital's *favelas*.

**Manaus**—Although it is not a capital, Manaus is a particularly interesting major city, located on the Amazon River in the Brazilian rainforest. Originally, Manaus served as a Portuguese fort, then later was converted to a mission with a small village. It was not until the rubber boom of the 1890s to the 1920s that Manaus became a true city. The prosperity of the rubber boom led to the construction of majestic homes and buildings such as a grand cathedral and a very ornate opera house, the Teatro Amazonas. The end of the boom led to a period of decline for the city, but today Manaus is a major inland port that exports several products and functions as a large collection and distribution center for trade on the Amazon River.

**La Paz**—La Paz is the administrative, legislative, and executive capital of Bolivia. Bolivia actually has two capital cities. Sucre, a beautiful colonial city located in south central Bolivia, is the judicial capital of the country and hosts the Bolivian Supreme Court. La Paz, however, has traditionally been the commercial and economic center of this Andean country. La Paz is located 30 miles from Lake Titicaca and is the highest capital in the world at 3,660 meters (about 12,000 feet) above sea level. The city itself is

## HANDOUT #5—continued

located in an enormous ravine or *barranca*. Poorer neighborhoods tend to be located near the rim of the ravine while wealthier neighborhoods are located at the bottom of this jagged canyon.

**Santo Domingo**—Santo Domingo is the Dominican Republic's capital and principal city.

It is the country's political, economic, and commercial center. This city is distinguished by being the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere. Christopher Columbus landed here on his first epic voyage, and the city is believed to be his final resting place.