Major Geographic Qualities

- Fragmented — physically and politically
- Barrier between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, land bridge between North and South America
- Culturally diversity and complexity
- Americas’ least-developed territories, some finding new opportunities
- Economic reforms, industrialization in Mexico, a member of NAFTA

Regions of Middle America
Physical Geography

- **Land bridge** between North and South America
- **Archipelago:** Greater and Lesser Antilles
- **Natural hazards**
  - Earthquakes
  - Volcanoes
  - Hurricanes

Volcano overlooking Antigua, Guatemala. The church on the left was damaged by an earthquake in 1976 and has not been repaired.

Natural Hazards

Volcanoes and Earthquakes

Hurricanes

Culture Hearth

**Source Area** from which radiated ideas, innovations, and ideologies that changed the world beyond

**Middle American Hearths**

Aztecs and their predecessors

Maya
Lowland Mesoamerica

Maya Civilization
- 3000 years ago
- Classic period 200-900 A.D.
- Honduras, Guatemala, Belize
- Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico
- Theocratic structure

Highland Mesoamerica

Teotihuacán
- North of modern Mexico City
- First urban area in the Americas

Aztec Civilization
- Pinnacle of a long sequence of civilizations in the Valley of Mexico
- Empire in central Mexico
- Tenochtitlán
  - Founded about 1300 A.D.
  - Population > 100,000 at Conquest
  - Site of modern Mexico city

The Legacy of Colonialism

- Land alienation
  - Appropriated for colonial commercial interests
  - Converted to cash cropping for export
- Results:
  - Famine
  - Poverty
  - Migration
  - Decreasing agricultural diversity
Spanish Colonial Town

- Layout was mandated by Spanish colonial law
- Result is regularity in city layout throughout Spanish Middle and South America

Mainland vs. Rimland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>MAINLAND</th>
<th>RIMLAND</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Greater isolation</td>
<td>Greater accessibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physiography</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Tropical lowland</td>
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<td>Culture</td>
<td>Hills/Plateau</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td>Landholding Patterns</td>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
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Hacienda

- Spanish cattle-holding institution
- Purpose was land-holding not profit-generating
- Not efficient but high social prestige
- Year-round jobs; workers lived on the land
- Self-sufficient but surplus for domestic market
- Diversified crops grown on relatively small plots of land
Plantations

- Production oriented for export
- Efficiency is key
- Typically a single cash crop (monocrop)
- Seasonal employment
- Purpose was commercial profit
- Market vulnerability
- Capital and technology imported