

Module: Cultural Geography
Topic Content: Cultural Regions Based on Ethnicity

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Introduction

An ethnic group is a collection of people who share cultural characteristics

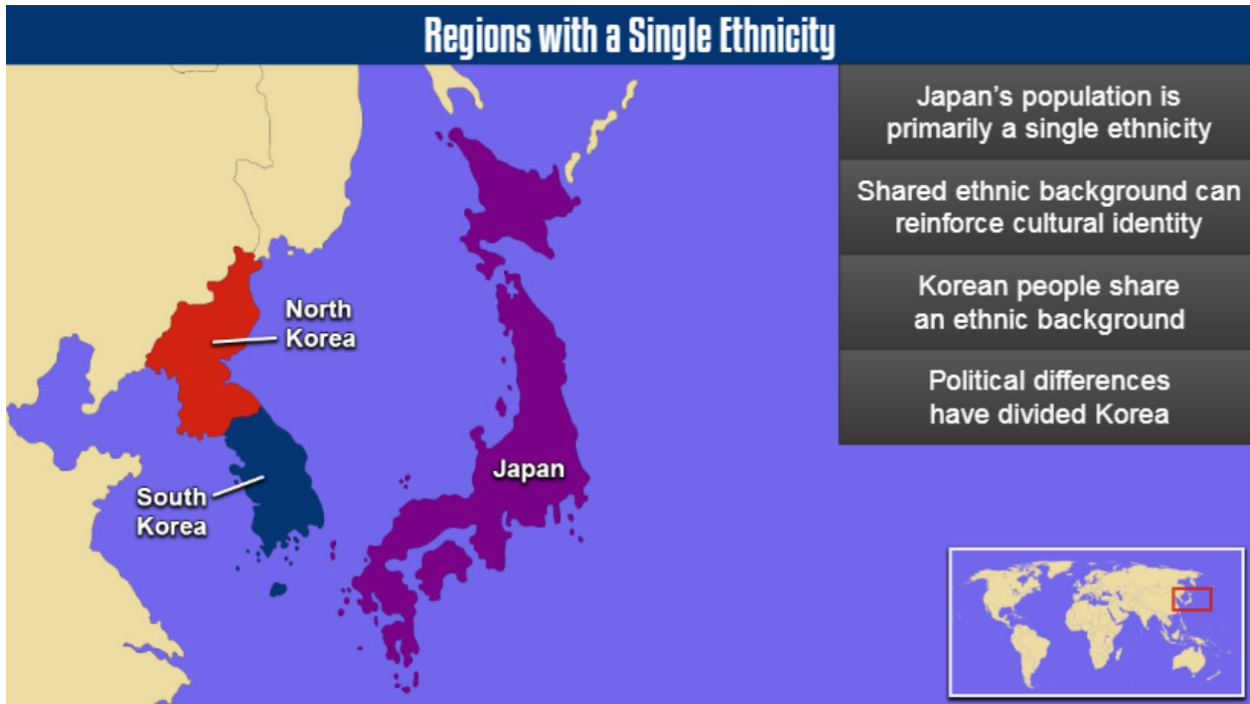


An ethnic group is a collection of people who share cultural characteristics like ancestry, art, customs, food, history, language, nationality, and religion. The term ethnicity is often confused with race, which refers to the physical characteristics of a group of people, rather than the cultural characteristics. Ethnic heritage is generally inherited, based on the cultural region where an individual is born.

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Regions with a Single Ethnicity

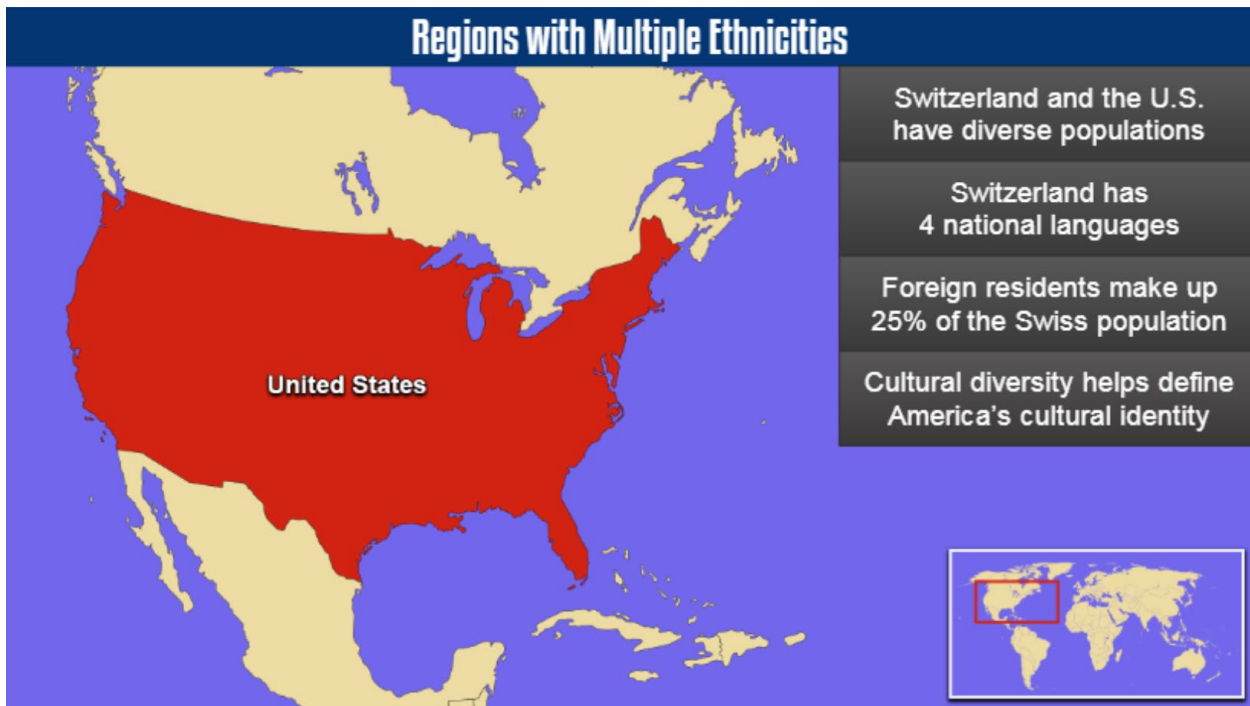


Ethnic heritage has the potential to unify groups of people. This is clearly observed in a country like Japan, where the population is primarily a single ethnicity. The shared ethnic background of the Japanese people helps reinforce their distinct cultural identity; however, this is not always enough to unify a region. For example, the nearby Korean peninsula is predominantly inhabited by people from a single ethnic background, but extreme political differences have divided the region into two nations: North Korea and South Korea.

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Regions with Multiple Ethnicities



Countries like the Switzerland and the United States are characterized by their diverse ethnic population. Switzerland is centrally located on the European continent, where multiple cultures intersect. The nation has four national languages, and foreign residents make up roughly 25% of the population. Similarly, people living in the United States are considered to be American, regardless of their ethnic background. The cultural diversity actually helps define America's cultural identity.

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Small Ethnic Regions



Small Ethnic Regions

- Some cultural regions only occupy a few city blocks
- Chinatowns are ethnic enclaves formed by immigrants
- Many enclaves formed as a response to discrimination
- Chinatowns now represent a celebration of Chinese culture
- Similar enclaves include Little Italy and Little Havana

An ethnic region does not necessarily cover a large area. In fact, some cultural regions, like Chinatowns, are contained within a few city blocks. Chinatowns can be found in most of the major cities around the world. They are essentially ethnic enclaves developed by Chinese immigrants seeking to protect themselves and preserve their cultural identity. In the United States, many Chinatowns were originally formed as a response to the discrimination Chinese immigrants faced. Today, Chinatowns are generally viewed as a celebration of Chinese culture. Similar enclaves exist for other ethnic groups, such as Little Italy in New York, and Little Havana in Miami.

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Kurdistan



Like most cultural regions, ethnic regions typically lack a distinct border. Most span multiple countries or divide larger regions. For example, the Kurds are an ethnic group that inhabits areas of Armenia, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. The Kurdish people are the majority population in this region, which is commonly referred to as Kurdistan. Although parts of the region are currently self-governed, many of the Kurdish people would like for Kurdistan to become a completely independent nation.

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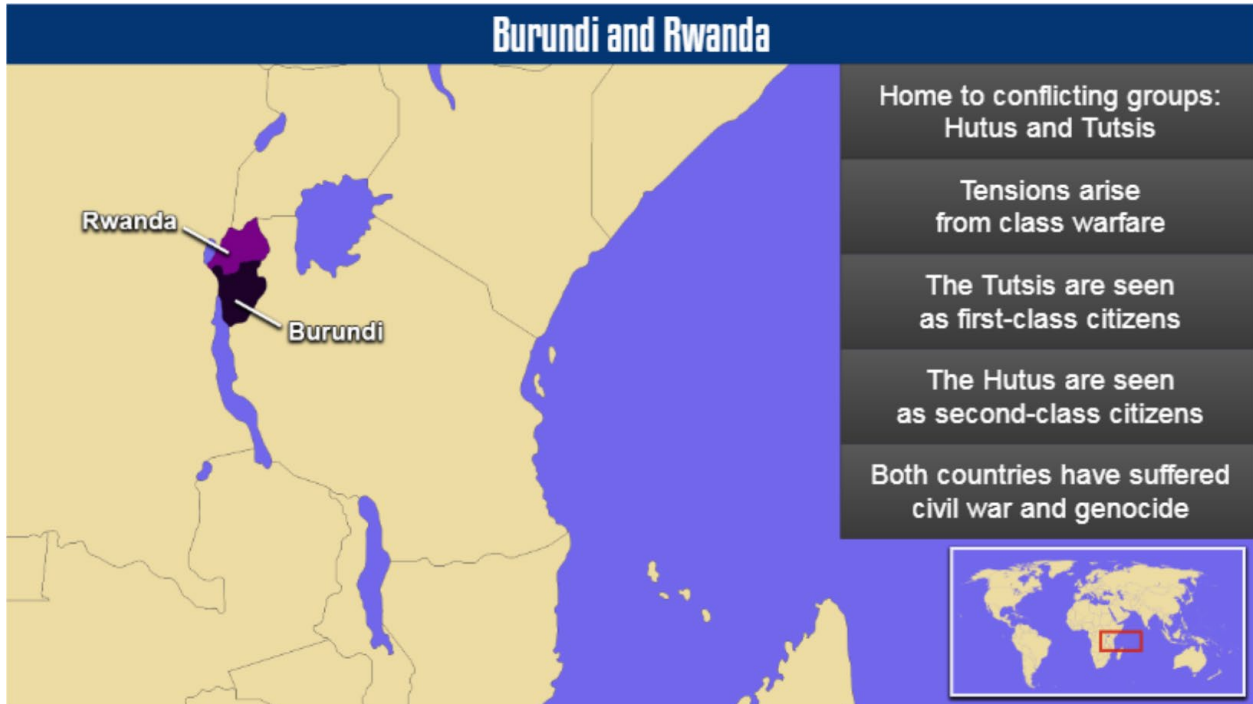
Cyprus



Ethnic heritage also has the potential to divide a region. The island of Cyprus is located south of Turkey in the Mediterranean Sea. The majority of the population is composed of two ethnic groups: the Greeks and the Turks. These two groups have been historically divided, which has resulted in violence on several occasions. The conflict eventually grew to involve the countries of Greece and Turkey. The Greek military ousted the President of Cyprus in an attempt to unify the island with Greece. This coup prompted the Turkish army to respond with an invasion. Although a ceasefire ended the fighting, the island is currently divided into a Southern region, the Republic of Cyprus, and a Northern Region, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

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Burundi and Rwanda



The East African countries of Burundi and Rwanda are home to conflicting ethnic groups known as the Hutus and the Tutsis. The tension between the Hutus and the Tutsis arises from class warfare, rather than a difference in religion or language. The primary cultural difference is that Tutsis, who are the minority, are seen as first-class citizens, while Hutus, who are the majority, are seen as second-class citizens. This dangerous dynamic has led to civil war and genocide in both countries.

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Yugoslavia



The former nation of Yugoslavia is another example of a region deeply divided by ethnic heritage. The country was established as a federation of six republics and two provinces, which were roughly divided along ethnic lines. This region is composed of a diverse group of people, including Albanians, Bosnian Muslims, Croats, Hungarians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Slovenes. The cultural differences among these people reinforced political tensions, which escalated into wars that divided the region into separate ethnic nations: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Kosovo is currently a disputed territory in the region, having declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.