

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Approach and Rationale	1
Content and Organization	1

Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview	3
II. Unit Context	3
III. Correlation with the National History Standards	3
IV. Unit Objectives	4
V. Lessons	4

Lessons

Lesson One: Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1900–1999.	5
Lesson Two: In Their Own Words: Oral Histories of Mexican Immigration	29
Lesson Three: <i>Corridos</i> : Songs of the People	43
Lesson Four: American Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1900–1999	55

Suggestions for Further Reading	76
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INTRODUCTION

I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1900–1999 is one of over seventy teaching units published by the National Center for History for the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of United States History. They represent specific issues and “dramatic episodes” in history from which you and your students can delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying crucial turning points in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, and Introduction to *Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1900–1999*; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 7–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany

Introduction

each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

Teacher Background

I. Unit Overview

According to the 2000 census, Latinos will soon be the largest minority group in the United States and the vast majority of Latinos are Mexican Americans or Mexican immigrants. How will America adjust to its changing demographics remains to be told, but lessons can be learned from the past. This unit provides teachers and students a lens into the past through primary sources that inform them of the reasons that Mexicans immigrated to the United States and reveal how Mexican immigrants responded to life in the U.S. and how the U.S. responded to Mexican immigration.

II. Unit Context

This unit covers the entire twentieth century and would fit within a course of study of United States history, immigration, or Mexican-American studies.

III. Correlation to National History Standards

Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1900–1999 offers teachers opportunities to connect with several standards in four different eras of twentieth-century United States history as delineated in *National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). The unit provides teaching materials that address **Standard 3A** of Era 7, The Emergence of Modern America, 1890–1930; **Standard 1B** of Era 8, The Great Depression and World War II, 1929–1945; **Standard 4A** of Era 9, Postwar United States, 1945 to the early 1970s; and **Standard 2B** of Era 10, Contemporary United States, 1968 to the Present.

Students investigate the social tensions and their consequences in the post World War I era by examining factors that lead to immigration restriction and its impact on Mexican immigration. While studying the Great Depression and World War II, students analyze the effects of repatriation during the 1930s and the establishment of the Bracero program during the war years. In the post-World War II period, students investigate and evaluate the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of Latino Americans in the quest for civil rights and equal opportunities. For the contemporary period, students analyze and debate the ethics and effectiveness of policies designed to curb undocumented Mexican immigration. Overall, students analyze the push-pull factors that prompted Mexican immigration throughout the twentieth century and identify the major issues that affected immigrants and explain the conflicts these issues engendered.

Students interrogate historical data from a variety of sources including legislative acts, oral histories, graphs, and *corridos*. The unit requires students to engage in historical thinking; to raise questions and to marshal evidence in support of their answers; to analyze cause-and-effect relationships; and to go beyond their textbooks and examine the historical record for themselves.

IV. Unit Objectives

1. Identify the push and pull factors involved in the immigration process.
2. Compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative primary sources.
3. Analyze the development of Mexican immigration to the United States between 1900 and 1999.
4. Evaluate the strengths and weakness of U.S. immigration policy.

V. Lessons

- Lesson One: Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1900–1999
- Lesson Two: In Their Own Words: Oral Histories of Mexican Immigration
- Lesson Three: *Corridos*: Songs of the People
- Lesson Four: American Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1900–1999