



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2006 Volume II: Latino Cultures and Communities

Introduction

The units that follow explore topics related to Latino cultures and communities in the United States. Each offers a stimulating guide for thinking about the place of Latin Americans in this country, and each in its own way represents a response to the changing nature of twenty-first century Connecticut. These units emerged in a time of considerable national and international debate about Latinos, about undocumented immigration, and about the enforcement of national borders, as our spring 2006 seminar coincided both with Congressional efforts to reform immigration regulations and with massive political demonstrations throughout the United States about immigrant rights.

In this context, the ten teachers who designed these units worked hard to understand Latino history over the past century, they debated contemporary topics such as bilingual education and labor unionism, and they read the work of influential scholars, poets, and fiction writers who have attempted to represent Latino experiences. The authors of these units thus grappled with the changes underway in the present day as well as the longstanding presence of Latinos in the United States. By crafting a diverse set of units related to Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other U.S. communities of Latin American origin, and by taking on subjects ranging from music to food, muralism to civil rights, these teachers authored a collective response to conditions in the contemporary urban Northeast. Their careful efforts reflected a deep, rather than a crisis-driven, engagement with important issues, and if their work suggests only a fraction of the countless topics that might have developed under the rubric of "Latino cultures and communities," it should be said that theirs is an impressive fraction, an exciting set of units which respond to the growing number of Latino students in local classrooms.

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