



## The Hispanic View of the Urban Setting

Curriculum Unit 81.01.05  
by Myrella Lara

### OBJECTIVES

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Migration to the cities is an universal phenomenon. While there are a number of reasons for this movement from native areas into the cities, immigrants from Puerto Rico have left the island neither for political nor religious reasons, but because of economic causes. Life in the island for many young adults, especially in rural areas, may seem to them intolerable. Thus, migration to the U.S.A. becomes the last stop in a process that may include moving first from the rural areas into the island's cities, and from there north to the mainland.

Our Hispanic students are caught between two worlds. One is that of his parents and family, sometimes left behind in the island. The other is the strange world of the great American city with its new language and culture. The students and their families see the large eastern city as the promised land where a better life can be attained. But since they have no prior urban experience the reality of the city, its deteriorating housing, shortage of jobs for the un-skilled and the urban atmosphere soon discourage the most hopeful.

Can these families succeed in the urban setting? What is required of an individual, or group, to "make it" in the American city? This unit will try to explore these questions. This is a five to six week unit designed to introduce Hispanic students to the urban environment and the opportunities such a setting provides. The active urban environment provides many opportunities for the student to develop alertness and observation skills that they will be able to use in their everyday encounters with life in the city. Some of the objectives of this unit are:

1. To increase the student's knowledge and experiential background of the city.
2. To help his language development in English.
3. To aid and encourage a higher level of thinking skills.
4. To explore and expose the student to a variety of enrichment activities.
5. To allow for the expression of the student's creativity, as expressed in their own writings and drawings.

This unit will be taught to advanced students in the Bilingual Program, within the English as a Second Language component. These classes meet once a day for forty-five minutes. In order to accomplish these objectives as they relate to the city experience, students will engage in selected readings, class discussions, trips, films and lectures.

Another outcome of this unit will be the student's increased awareness of their immediate environment: the city of New Haven. Many students rarely learn their section of the city, limiting their exposure to the neighborhood where they live. I would like to expose them to the many activities and services a city like New Haven has to offer, as well as to its historical and cultural aspects. Different activities will familiarize the students with their city and bring a higher level of appreciation for the different ethnic groups that inhabit the area. It is my belief that identifying these characteristics and traits of the urban environment will help the Hispanic student deal with this urban world many of them are encountering for the first time in their lives. The influence (positive as well as negative) that the American city has exercised upon the Hispanic population will be explored through literature produced by authors who have experienced the city in America.

This unit can be divided into five general areas on a weekly basis:

First Week: The city: characteristics of the urban setting.

Second Week: Migration to the cities.

Third Week: Conflict between new land and homeland.

Fourth Week: Living in New Haven.

Fifth Week: Conclusions, projects by students based on materials presented.

The areas to be explored include literature, writing, class discussions, films, research. Each of these will be part of the weekly activities revolving around the theme of the city. Under literature the students will read assigned stories from Jesus Colon's *A Puerto Rican in New York*. Students will write their own stories, based on their experiences in the city. Discussions in class will revolve around the material presented and the assigned readings. Films and filmstrips will be viewed and research assignments will be carried out by the students in the form of surveys and questions to ask their families and friends. Students will apply their language skills to these tasks and be able to improve on their second language abilities.

## STRATEGIES

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The authors that have addressed the issue of the city have been many. The Puerto Rican "Generation of 1940" claims the following authors: Pedro Juan Soto, Emilio Diaz Valcarcel, Rene Marquez, Jose Luis Gonzalez, Luis Rafael Sanchez and Abelardo Diaz Alfaro. These authors have concentrated on the urban world of New York City, with its slums and new arrivals who hope to start a new life in America. A particularly hopeful book is *Tropico en Manhattan*, by Guillermo Cotto Thorner, from which students will glean the everyday frustrations of an ex-teacher finding work and a new life in New York City. I would recommend that teachers planning to use this unit look into all these authors, keeping in mind the age-level that they plan to be teaching. Some of the works by Pedro Juan Soto (*Spiks*) are quite strong in language and descriptions; however some older students may be able to handle them with the right direction coming from the teacher. For my own students I

have decided to study the following stories, all by Jesus Colon, and found in his book *A Puerto Rican in New York*. The stories I have chosen have certain characteristics: low difficulty in vocabulary, everyday problems, positive outcomes. I rejected stories that dwelled only on the seamy side of city living but attempted to find stories that will bring the students a balanced and hopeful solution to the conflicts presented.

These stories will be introduced on a weekly basis, over a period of four weeks. The topics will match the one being discussed in class and a vocabulary list will be introduced and reviewed with the students prior to the actual reading. The activities that will result from the stories will trigger class discussions, written projects, comparisons, oral expression, and creative projects done by the students. Some of the strategies I plan to work on are:

1. To base all work on student's needs and general English abilities.
2. To emphasize oral and written language.
3. To provide outside classroom activities, such as trips.
4. To encourage student's expression in written, oral and artistic areas.

As part of the strategy for reaching the goals before mentioned, the students will read and research for grounds of similarity between their former lives and their present environment. From their personal experiences, which are rich and varied, they will explore the feelings they harbor in relation to city living and other ethnic groups in the area. Students will direct their thoughts towards successful city living skills and adaptation.

I would like to present a weekly plan of topics, readings, assignments and activities for this five-week period of time. Please refer to the bibliography for further selections and materials.

### ***FIRST WEEK: The City: Characteristics of the Urban Setting.***

The teacher will present the subject by means of lecturing or direct use of the school's social studies textbook. In *Exploring the Urban World* (9th grade level) the authors state that the modern city had its first beginnings with the invention of the automobile. The idea of transportation as a main cause of immigration has a lot of value in the context of the Hispanic student who travels (by plane) back and forth between the mainland and Puerto Rico. These metropolitan areas supply jobs and goods to a large segment of the population and thus, become an attraction to families seeking a better way of life. The film *Miguel, Up From Puerto Rico* would also be suitable for the first day of this unit, to present the subject at hand in a recognizable setting.

At this time the term "urbanism" can be introduced and discussed. The term "urbanism" has been described as a way of behaving, can be applied to any one person who can be very urban in his way of thinking even if he happens to live in a village. The urban person is not disturbed by the coming and going of people, he is always making new acquaintances and forgetting the old ones; transiency is one of his characteristics. Superficiality in interpersonal relationships is another. (Louis Wirth, in his book *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, points out these qualities of urban man).

As a first day homework assignment, students can be given the task of reading the newspaper and bringing in

a clipping illustrating “urban life”. During this first week the story *Easy Jobs, Good Wages* will be read by the students, to be followed by a discussion in class and a written assignment. Students will follow up this theme of jobs and money in the city with another assignment: that of looking in the “help wanted” columns for at least five jobs that appeal to them. The students will come prepared to defend their choices of jobs as they relate to the salaries they pay, the working conditions, the opportunity for advancement. Out of this activity I hope to bring the students to considerations of what kind of education and background they will need in order to obtain these positions. The skills required in the city as opposed to jobs in the rural areas will be discussed, with the students bringing into the classroom their former experience and that of their families and friends. A *Family Tree* activity, in which the students chart out the occupations of their grandparents, aunts and uncles, father and mother, in family tree fashion, will help illustrate the job trends within their own groups, and identify, if any, changes that the student foresees in his own work life. The *Janus Series on Survival Skills* provides the teacher with sample job applications and interview skills that may be used in this part of the unit as it pertains to job hunting in the city.

***Conclusions By the end of the first week the students have been exposed to the city, as an urban center. The qualities of successful city living and realities (finding a job) have also been explored. Students have read from their text and from Colon’s book, as well as done research on the subject (newspaper clippings, family interviews). Now let’s go back and find out the reason for coming to the city in the first place.***

### ***SECOND WEEK: Rural Migration to the City .***

Migration to the cities of the United States is not a new trend among Puerto Ricans. In fact, Puerto Ricans were living in the mainland more than 140 years ago; and during the 1830’s the founding members of a Spanish benevolent society in New York included many Puerto Rican merchants. In the late 1800’s the movement for independence from Spain was being planned in New York City by groups of Puerto Rican and Cuban patriots. The United States took over Puerto Rico in 1898 and, twelve years later, there were 1,513 Puerto Ricans in the mainland. The earliest migrants settled in the East Harlem sector of Manhattan, which came to be known as El Barrio.

By World War I migrants came because jobs were plentiful, and during the 1930’s around 53,000 had settled in the mainland. Those who came earlier were essentially urban dwellers: the rural masses had not yet begun to emigrate. According to a 1947 study, Puerto Ricans in New York City had higher incomes than Puerto Ricans in the island, they were more urban, more skilled, and more educated. A stable record of employment was found in those who had migrated. <sup>1</sup> But these successful forerunners were followed by others less prepared to take the risk of starting a new life and learning a foreign language. Thus, farm laborers and un-skilled workers began an ever-increasing exodus in the American cities. By 1970, more than thirty U.S. cities had Puerto Rican communities of 5,000 or more persons. Among them: Newark, New Jersey; Paterson, New Jersey; Hoboken, New Jersey; Boston, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Miami, Florida; Los Angeles, California. <sup>2</sup>

At this point, students can discuss what they think are main causes for coming to live in the United States: jobs, education, housing, family ties. Are they planning to stay here, in the city, or would they like to go and live in a small town? How different do they find life in the city as compared to their former lives in the island? During this week students will read the short story *Grandma Please Don’t Come* and discuss the pros and cons of leaving the rural area and living in the city. As an assignment related to this topic, I will have students write positive and negative letters to an imaginary relative/friend who is considering moving to a northern city. I would recommend teachers read *My First Growing Up*, a short essay found in Barry Levine’s *Benjy Lopez: A*

*Picaresque Tale of Emigration and Return* . Teachers may consider reading aloud to the class certain passage relating to rural life in Puerto Rico.

**THIRD WEEK: Conflict Between New Land and Homeland .**

Puerto Ricans have come from the most part in the first great airborne migration of people from abroad; they have been the newcomers of the aviation age. They have also been the first group to come in large numbers from a different cultural background but who are, nevertheless, citizens of the U.S.A. As newcomers to a new land, they have to adjust to the realities of the city they have chosen to migrate to. Joseph Fitzpatrick, in his book *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*, lists the following first and essential adjustments of newcomers to the new urban society:

- a. Knowledge of English language.
- b. Ability to seek work and perform well.
- c. Participation in political life.
- d. Suitable place to live (and to live in such a way that they may remain there).
- e. Acceptance of fundamental requirements to live in the city.
- f. Maintenance of health.
- g. Education for children up to 16 years of age.
- h. Observance of laws and reasonable respect for others.

Students may discuss the merits and importance of these points as they relate to successful transfer from the rural island setting to the American city. The changes of values within the family unit are also a cause of this migration. While the homeland values stress the role of the man as bread and decision-maker within the family unit, the arrival to the urban setting brings those values into disarray. As women get jobs outside the home, thus fostering some economic independence, the family feels the tension and change of family roles. As parents, when the children start to act according to the American pattern, the parents cannot understand (for example: dating customs). The family finds itself alone, in a completely foreign environment.

Students will be assigned to read two stories, *A Hero in the Junk Truck* and *The Day My Father Got Lost* . Students will be asked to identify the characteristics of the city presented in the stories and compare them to New Haven. During this third week of the unit I will ask students to start collecting and bringing in images of the city as found in magazine pictures, drawings of their own, newspaper clippings. These materials will be kept in school in preparation of a collage to be constructed during the fifth week of the unit. This collage will illustrate the city as the students see it, as the writer sees it, as the teacher's lectures have explained it to be. Students will work on this collecting during the next weeks of the unit.

**FOURTH WEEK: Living in New Haven .**

What better way to introduce the students to New Haven than by having a field trip around the city? The city's visitor's center offers all kinds of information as to tours of the city, with guides. This will expose the students to New Haven's neighborhoods, with their varied ethnic heritage and flavor. A most useful publication, by the Office of Community Relations of Yale University, will provide the teacher with useful historical and current information on the city. The *Guide to New Haven Neighborhoods*, by Marguerite Durkin, describes the arts and entertainment in New Haven, as well as its neighborhoods: Long Wharf, Downtown, The Hill, The West Side, Fair Haven, Wooster Square, Edgewood, Whitney-Orange area. Maps of the city are also available, free of charge, at the Visitor's Center. These will provide for several map-related activities with the students, such as finding the neighborhoods in their maps, locating agencies, services, schools, hospitals, and other vital services. Students will look up information and learn how to read the map legends.

Students will keep a log for two weeks of places visited (example: agencies, hospital, shopping mall downtown, school), the objective of this activity is to survey how far from their homes and into the community do the students go for services, entertainment, and socialization. Many students seldom leave their immediate neighborhood and this would be an ideal time to introduce them to all the resources and services a city such as New Haven has to offer.

### **FIFTH WEEK: Conclusions .**

This last week I would like to leave open to finish discussions, complete map projects, and put together the city collage the students have been collecting for two weeks now. It is also the time to read the journals and find out (by means of a tally) how many neighborhoods have the students ventured into since our tour of the city. A showing of the movie *An Island in America* , which depicts the Puerto Rican community in the mainland, including an account of social, cultural, and economic conditions set against a background of the history of the island will help close this unit. This film emphasizes new concepts in the education of children particularly the teaching of English as a Second Language. Another suitable film for this week would be *Puerto Rican* (Part 1 and 2) which discusses the ways in which Puerto Ricans are dealing with their problems, such as becoming accepted American citizens. As with all films, teachers are advised to preview them and decide if the material is suitable for the age group they are dealing with. Students should also be lead in a discussion on how certain aspects of the city and of migration may be biased in a negative or positive way by the films, and what the reality really is like. I hope this recognition of the problems of the city will help the Hispanic student cope with his environment in a positive way. Once the city is familiar to the student, as familiar as his homeland used to be, Hispanics will become a vital part of the communities they live in and will bring about social changes that are long overdue. But we must first help the students vocalize their feelings and fears and show them that they are not alone in the city. There are millions more.

### **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

#### **First week**

1. Showing of the film *Miguel Up From Puerto Rico*, to introduce the students to the unit.

Discussion of the situation presented in the film will follow. Questions:

-How did you feel when you arrived to New Haven?

-Is Miguel happier in N.Y. than in Puerto Rico?

-Name five things that are different in Miguel's new life in the city.

-Which life do you like best? Why ? A written assignment can be derived from this discussion in class.

2. Reading: *Easy Job, Good Wages*, by Jesus Colon. In this story recent arrivals to the city apply for a job advertised in the paper as the title says. The realization, after being on the job for a whole day, is that if the job were really easy, the wages could not be that good. The author realizes that he needs more to offer or all he will ever have to work in will be mechanics, inhuman jobs.

Discussion of the story would be followed by a homework assignment related to job hunting: students will bring in at least five clippings from the “help wanted” columns of jobs that appeal to them. They will defend their choices in class discussion as to why they feel they would be happy in this kind of job; the salary, education required or training, experience, working conditions as advertised would all be explored. Clippings will be posted on a bulletin board so students can exchange “jobs” if they happen to see more appealing ads than the ones they brought in. At this time students will be ready for the next job-related activity.

3. Job Applications: Students will fill these out with the qualifications they see themselves as having after finishing high school. Students will have to make one choice at the outset of this activity: are they going to college, vocational school, army, or just out to get a job as soon as they graduate. The application will be filled out keeping this “future” in mind.

4. Family Tree: Students will map out their closest relative’s occupations. This may involve some interviewing, so it should be given as an overnight assignment or over the weekend. Some questions to be explored are: are the occupations listed by the students suited for the city? have we seen them before in the newspaper clippings? Students would write “job descriptions” in 3 x 5 cards and post them on the bulletin board, without names (we would not want to embarrass students about menial jobs in their families).

## **Second week**

1. Reading: *Grandma, Please Don't Come*, by Jesus Colon. This story is in the form of a letter to the family back in the island. It gives them all kinds of reasons as to why they should not leave their tropical paradise and come to the big city (New York). Discussion of the story will be followed by a written assignment of a letter to an imaginary (or real) relative in Puerto Rico, giving them five good reasons for coming to New Haven. Class should be divided into groups, with some writing positive letters, others doing the negative letter.

2. Film strip: *Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans*, which explores life in the island. Since the theme of this week is migration this film will be useful. Class discussion could include the following questions:

1. Do you know why people migrate to foreign countries?
2. Who migrates to Puerto Rico? Why? (point out to students that many Americans migrate to the island to work).

3. Why is migration difficult?
4. Would migration from New Haven to New York be as difficult as it is from Puerto Rico to New Haven? Why?

### **Third Week**

1. Reading : *A Hero in the Junk Truck* , by Jesus Colon. In this story a Hispanic couple traveling on a bus spot a picture of Simon Bolivar on the back of a garbage truck. The couple is able to obtain the picture and take it home with them. The fact that people they encounter on the way (and some of their American friends) recognize and praise Bolivar brings a measure of respect and mutual understanding for each other's culture. Questions for the students to consider and write about:

1. What other Spanish heroes can you mention? If none, do some research and name three.
2. How do you think that the picture got into the truck?
3. Who did the couple take the picture home with them?
4. If you were an American living in Puerto Rico and found a picture of George Washington in the junk truck how would you feel?

2. Reading: *The Day My Father Got Lost* , by Jesus Colon, narrates what happens on an ordinary day, when two brothers go to work in the city while their father takes a walk around the neighborhood. The problem is that the old man does not speak English, and the only way he knows how to find his way back home is by a series of landmarks he has learned to recognize. On this particular day one of the landmarks is no longer there . . .

### **Questions:**

Name five things that describe the city in the story.

Would the father had gotten lost in a small town?

What would you do if you got lost in New Haven?

3. Images of the city: magazine, newspaper clippings. Students will start collecting pictures about



the city. Teachers should have some printed materials available for students who do not have any magazines at home. Students may also draw their own version of city scenes from their experience. Groups may also be formed for this activity, with one of them assigned to the gathering of non-city (rural) pictures. The actual building of the display will take place during the last week of the unit.

### **Fourth Week**

1. Field trip: in preparation for the New Haven tour, materials should be picked up at the visitor's Center and Chamber of Commerce. With maps in hand, students will proceed to work on the following areas:

Tour: Teacher will explain the upcoming tour of the city and help/teach students to trace the route on their maps.

Home: Students will find their home address on the map.

School: Students will locate New Haven schools.

Sections: Teacher will explain about the different neighborhoods.

Services: Students will locate hospitals, agencies and public buildings.

Teachers may consider using *Janus Survival Skill Series: How To Read Maps* .

2. Travel Log: students will begin to keep a log of the places they visit:

DAY	FROM	TO	REASON	ACCOMPANIED BY
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Monday	Home	Hospital	Doctor	Mother and sister
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This log will be kept for two weeks. Travel Log information will be transferred to the maps by means of connecting lines.

### **Fifth Week**

1. Clippings will be organized into a poster by students. This project will allow them to express their creativity and artistic talents.

2. Travel Log Tally: On a map, posted on the wall, students will trace the different trips and places they have written down in their Travel Logs. Assign one color to each student.

3. Movie: *An Island in America* which shows Puerto Ricans in America. A discussion of the film should include questions as to how the students see themselves in America: are they visitors only? do they plan to stay?

A written assignment would pose the question: Hispanics in New Haven are \_\_\_\_\_. (Students will fill in the blank with a descriptive phrase) They will then write a short essay, answering, defending, or challenging fellow student's statements. (Example: Hispanics in New Haven are overcrowding the schools—Why the schools? Are all the Hispanics in New Haven of school age? Is this then a migration of younger people?, etc.).

4. Follow-up Survey: Students will answer the following questions:

1. Name five things you have learned from this unit.
2. Name two activities you enjoyed most.
3. Name one activity you did not care for.
4. Would you like to do a similar unit next year?
5. What other ethnic group would you like to study next ?
6. What would you like to do next time that was not done this time?

## **MATERIALS RECOMMENDED FOR STUDENTS**

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Colon, Jesus. *A Puerto Rican In New York*. (New York, 1961). Stories assigned in class by the teacher.

Durkin, Marguerite. *A Guide To New Haven Neighborhoods*. (New Haven, 1978). Description of the city and a guide to its resources and history.

Levine, Barry B. *Benjy Lopez: A Picaresque Tale of Emigration and Return*. (New York, 1980). Chapter on the historical development of Puerto Ricans.

O'Connor, John R. *Exploring the Urban World*. (New York, 1980). Chapters 1-3.

## CLASSROOM MATERIALS

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Movie: *An Island in America* , 1972. Made by DMS Productions, 28 minutes, sound, color. This movie presents a profile of Puerto Rican communities on the mainland. Emphasizes the educational aspect.

Movie: *Miguel Up From Puerto Rico* , 1970. Made by Bert Salzman Productions, released by Learning Corporation of America, 15 minutes, sound, color. The story of how a boy born in Puerto Rico learns the advantages of bilingualism. Filmed in New York and Puerto Rico.

Film Strip: *Puerto Rico and the Purto Ricans* , 1969. Urban Media Materials, two film strips, color, two records. This film strip examines the island and its people, including who they are, where they came from. Contributions Puerto Ricans make to their adopted cities in the United States. Suitable for the second week of the unit.

Film Strip: *Puerto Ricans* , Part I and II , 1968. Warren Schloat Productions. Discusses ways in which Puerto Ricans are dealing with the problem of becoming accepted American citizens. (Older groups of students).

## Notes

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1. Barry Levine, "Benjy Lopez," (New York, 1980), p. 193.
2. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Puerto Ricans in the Continental U.S.* (Washington, 1972), p. 215.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR TEACHERS

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Anderson, Nels. *The Urban Community: A World Perspective* . New York: Holt & Co., 1959. An introduction to the topic of cities.

Colon, Jesus. *A Puerto Rican in New York* . New York: Mainstream Pub., 1961. Short stories dealing with life in New York. Students will be reading selections from this book.

Cotto, Guillermo. *Tropico en Manhattan* . Mexico: Editorial Cordillera, 1967. Teachers will enjoy this book about the ex-teacher who migrates to the big city and tries to adjust. The way he deals with this new foreign world may give you a deeper understanding of the problems encountered by the Hispanic students. (This book is available in English).

Fitzpatrick, Joseph. *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* . New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1971. Historical and Sociological facts of the migration to the cities.

Levine, Barry B. *Benjy Lopez: A Picaresque Tale of Emigration and Return* . New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980. Life in America, with a historical chapter dealing with migration and returning to the island.

Lockett, Edward B. *The Puerto Rico Problem* . New York: Exposition Press, 1964. A Study of Puerto Rican migration to the United States.

Soto, Pedro Juan. *Spiks* . New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973. Stories about living in El Barrio. Strong language, adult situations.

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