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South American Immigration: Argentina

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“Ever since Adam and Eve were forced out of the Garden of Eden, men have been on the move, and the movement has spread culture and stimulated invention. When man is mobile he meets other men, and sparks fly between brains as well as between swords. Constant confrontation with new situations in nature and in social relationships demands adaptation and creativity, leads to invention and development.” (8, page 1).

Since early times man has been on the move, always looking for new places, better opportunities, easier living conditions. This migration has covered every part of the world, with the exception of Antarctica, and has taken people from every corner of the world to another. Here in the United States we have a history of great immigration beginning from the early settlers of Jamestown in 1607 to the present “boat people”. But just as millions of people have come to North America, millions more have immigrated to South America.

But for the purpose of this paper I will concentrate on immigration in the last century or so, and focus on immigration to Argentina and South America. In this period of history we have massive migration, and in fact

“in the hundred years between 1830 and 1930, 60,000,000 men, women, and children left Europe, and 40,000,000 of them cast off forever the ties of home, family and fatherland. They populated the prairies, raised wheat for the factory workers of their European homelands, developed new forms of government, and invented new machines and new gadgets, not only for themselves but to sell to the peoples across the oceans.” (8, page 3).

This 19th century migration took people from developed countries to the empty spaces of new continents; it took them in large numbers across the oceans, and it first attracted the willing but untrained masses, the agricultural workers, and then the industrial. Together with this voluntary migration, we also have forced migration, as the African slave trade to both South and North America.

One of the most important results of this movement is the fact that: “migration both facilitates borrowing and stimulates creativity.” (8, page 4). The immigrant learns from his new environment, but at the same time brings to it his experiences and his knowledge. This mobility of different people brings on the blending of blood, of languages, religions, and customs. In other words, the famous “melting pot” that, for example, the United States are supposed to have achieved.

In the early years of immigration, not many restrictions were placed on the people that were admitted to their

new homes, but as the years went by, the hosting countries realized that there were many “undesirables” that should not be accepted, and from there we had restrictions.

Many changes in Europe, as the decline of feudalism, increase in population, new developments in shipping, attracted people to the New World, and they came by the millions. Many came for economic reasons, but other for religious reasons, as the Jews at repeated times.

But the “great migration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a movement of individuals. Each person had to make his own decision even if he came with a group. And millions came entirely alone. They were affected by the deep-seated social causes of migration, but they were more immediately driven by the circumstances of their lives, by factors such as disappointment in love, a brush with the police, a dispute with the boss, an overbearing father, or an urge for adventure. Reasons and combinations of reasons could be numbered to infinity. The only factors universally applicable were dissatisfaction with things as they were, and hope in what might be elsewhere.” (8, page 11)

As in North America, the migration to South America originated mainly in Europe, and as stated above, with a considerable number of negro slaves from Africa. With themselves the Europeans brought their Christian religion, their languages and their customs. However many of the immigrants to North America came from Northern Europe bringing with them the influence of their Protestant religion and culture. In Latin America, instead, the majority of immigrants came from Southern Europe, and therefore the predominant religious influence has been Roman Catholic, rather than Protestant. The languages of these new immigrants were Spanish and Portuguese, and the basic political institutions, Mediterranean rather than English.

Another important factor in the assimilation of the Europeans in South America, has been that:

“the ancient culture and population of the south proved far stronger than those forces in the north; this led in Mexico and in the southern hemisphere to more of a blending of people and cultures, whereas in both Canada and the United States the European heritage was overwhelming.” (8, page 59).

Following the journeys of Columbus, the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors came to Latin America in search of gold and new land. The conquest of these lands was done in the name of the Iberian rulers, and the conquered people accepted the economy and the political and social systems of the conqueror. Few other Europeans, beside the Spanish and the Portuguese were encouraged to emigrate to Latin America; but “once they had gained their independence, the new Latin-American republics, bent on transforming their colonial past, first only in theory and then in practice, modified their immigration systems radically opening the sluices of the New Continent to admit European newcomers.” (2, page 3).

However it was not until 1870, about 50 years after independence, that a really open immigration policy began in the Latin American countries. This open immigration brought millions to South America, changing the population from 23,163,000 in 1850, to 231,070,000 in 1980. (2, page 118). This overwhelming increase in numbers was caused by the natural growth of the population, but also by the large numbers of immigrants that were attracted to South America. Many of these millions emigrated to Argentina.

Historical Background of Argentina

“The sixteenth century conquistadors dreamed of the Rio de la Plata—the land and river of silver. The dream of Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century was ‘hacer la America’—to pick money off the streets of Buenos Aires. Such were the dreams, however illusory, which underlay the complex development of Argentina. Indians,

Spaniards, and other foreigners settled this country. Cattle, sheep, and wheat contributed to its prosperity. From metropolis and village, porte-o (of the port, hence, of Buenos Aires) and provinces, finally emerged a nation.” (8, page 1).

Today 30 million Argentines live in a country that is about 1 million square miles, and this country reaches from the Antarctic wastes of the south to the tropical jungles of the north. The density of the population varies from Buenos Aires, where a third of all the Argentine population lives, to the desolation of Patagonia. In fact three-quarters of the people live in towns and cities. It is a largely urbanized nation, boasting a “racial homogeneity, a national literacy rate of more than 90 percent, and a close relationship to Europe.” (6, page 4).

The first recorded visit by Europeans to Argentina can be dated to 1516, when Juan Diaz de Solis entered the Rio de la Plata and claimed the territory for Spain. This exploration, however, was not successful because of the confrontation with the Indians, where de Solis and most of his men were killed. The few soldiers that survived this first brutal encounter with the Indians, returned to Spain carrying the silver trinkets given to them by some friendlier Indians. This brought about a silver rush, but little silver was discovered along the coast. In 1526 Sebastian Cabot, an Italian, under the service of Spain, sailed up the river and established the first temporary European settlement near the present site of Rosario. Other settlements followed after Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire of Peru in 1532, and in fact a temporary settlement was established on the site of Buenos Aires in 1536. But this settlement did not last very long, being constantly attacked by the Querandi Indians, and it was abandoned in 1541. From the colony of Asunción, present day Paraguay, settlers moved out and founded Tucumán in 1565 and Córdoba in 1573. Finally in 1580, Juan de Garay, established a lasting settlement at Buenos Aires. It remained a small town for many generations, because the attention of the Spaniards was focused on other territories farther north. This little control on the part of Spain contributed to the development of an independent spirit for the Spaniards living in Argentine territories. The new generations of Spaniards, or Creoles, as the Spaniards born in the new world were called, were given little voice in the government run by Spaniards born in Spain. Together with this there were severe restrictions on trade, and on the movement of goods in South America. This situation encouraged the illegal trade of goods and “Buenos Aires became a smugglers heaven.” (14, page 26).

By 1778, a free trade policy opened up the entire Atlantic coast, and this boom in trade contributed to the growth of Buenos Aires. This growth brought more people to the city, and together with the Creoles, we find the mestizos, children of Spaniards or Europeans and Indians, and the early immigrants from Germany, Holland and Italy (15, page 30). Also from these mestizos came the first gauchos, the hardy cattle herders of the pampas. These two groups, the gauchos of the pampas, and the smuggler merchants of Buenos Aires, began to feel dissatisfied with the Spanish rule. Feeling the pressure from these colonies, Spain in 1776 finally created the Viceroyalty of Le Plata, with Buenos Aires as its capital. The city was declared a free port, and with the increased import and export the capital began to prosper and its population to increase.

The successful revolt of the American colonies in the North, the defeat of the French and Spanish fleets of Trafalgar, convinced the South American colonies that their, time of freedom had come. Under the able guidance of Jose de San Martin, an Argentinean born in 1778 in the province of Misiones, and Simon Bolivar, the South American hero, Argentina, and eventually all the countries of South America were able to declare their independence from Spain. But freedom from Spain did not mean peace in Argentina. In fact, conflicts broke between the Unitarist party that wanted to centralize control in the capital city, and the Federalist Party, that wanted to establish a federal union of the different regions of the country. This conflict brought on many years of unrest, assassinations, and finally the ruthless dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas, who held power,

from 1829 to 1852. After de Rosas was pushed out of power and sent into exile, representatives of the various provinces met and wrote a new constitution, based on that of the United States, but granting more power to the president than does the United States Constitution. Still conflicts existed between Buenos Aires and the provinces, until 1861 when Buenos Aires was once again declared the capital.

“The next three presidents, Mitre, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and Nicolás Avellaneda, all were intellectuals who favored better education for the people. They also supported more immigration. But their administration had a dark side as well. Under their rule, the Indians were finally defeated in Patagonia. The Araucanians could not compete with an army that carried repeating rifles. This was called the Conquest of the Desert. It opened new lands for immigrants and native Argentines. But the Indian culture was destroyed. Hardly any trace remains.” (15, page 45).

Because the number of Indians left in the land was minimum, Argentina never developed, like the other South American countries, a large lower class of Indians and mestizos who were ruled by a small aristocracy of European descent (14, page 32).

Political reform began in the following years, and finally in 1910 the right to vote was given to all men over the age of 18, regardless of their status. This legislation eventually brought on the power of the middle class, well represented at the ballots. Argentina continued with its social reforms, but the Depression years of the 1930 affected this country as well. With the onset of World War II Argentina declared itself neutral, but many Italian and German immigrants living in Argentina expressed openly, their sympathy for the Axis. In 1946 Juan Domingo Perón was elected President, a position he held until 1955, and then again between 1973 and 1974. His early presidency was very popular, due also to the large following enjoyed by his wife Eva Perón, but as the years went by he became more and more dictatorial, and finally in September of 1955 his government was taken over by the army and he went into exile. By this time Argentina was nearly bankrupt. Many years of instability followed, plagued by demonstrations, military juntas, high inflation and complete disregard for the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. Finally with the election of Raul Alfonsín in 1983, Argentina returned to democracy, and the 1853 Constitution was restored.

History of Immigration

As we have seen in the previous pages, Argentina as many other countries of the new world attracted immigrants from the beginning. Although the number of immigrants in the early years was low, it gradually increased and eventually Argentina became one of the world’s leading countries of immigration in modern times, reaching an all-time high in the period between 1880-1916

“In the peak period of the world’s overseas migration, 1821-1932, six countries absorbed 90 per cent of the total, and among these six, Argentina ranked second in the number of immigrants, with a total of 6,405,000. The only other Latin American country on the list is Brazil, with 4,431,000. The United States, of course, came first with about 5 times as many as Argentina.” (11, page 54).

Between 1857 and 1958 the main source of immigrants to Argentina were Italy and Spain accounting for 46 and 33 percent, respectively, of the total. The rest of the immigrants were made up of different nationalities, including French, German, British, and Irish. “Though their numbers were small, these minority immigrants groups averaged high in special skills and soon achieved distinction in their new home.” (11, page 55)

But most of the immigrants came from poor classes of society, and the majority of them began working as laborers, either in the cities or in the country. “Indeed, half of the gross immigration was made up of seasoned

workers or “swallows” (Golondrinas) who crossed the Atlantic only to work the Southern Hemisphere harvest season in Argentina and then recross it for the Northern Hemisphere harvest season at home.” (11, page 55). At the same time many immigrants remained in the country and established themselves in the economy of the country, becoming small businessmen, shopkeepers, artisans, office workers, or members of the liberal professions. The children of these immigrants rose quickly on the economic scale, and some even on the political scale, for example Carlos Pellegrini, who was elected President in 1890.

The immigrants that remained in Argentina found more opportunities for economic development in the cities, than not in the rural areas, and more in agriculture than not in stock raising. Buying land was made hard for them not only by the land system, but also by the fact that native Argentines held on to their properties, because of the great social prestige associated with landowning. In stockraising also they were allowed as common laborers, with few opportunities of ownership. Stockraising “was the most traditional Argentine way of life, and it acquired a new glamour when the beef barons became the rulers, and their “estancias” the symbols of the thriving new Argentina.” (11, page 56). An exception to this was the attraction of the pampas for sheep raising. The shepherds could settle in one area, built a hut and raise their families. But this monotonous life was of little attraction to the gauchos, used to the freedom and wandering life of cattle raising, and therefore attracted some immigrants who were only looking to make a living.

“Irish and Basque immigrants hard workers, inured to privation, readily accepted the heavy seasonal labors of lambing, sheeping and dipping. For the rest of the year monotony dominated their lives. Yet mutton cooked over a smoldering fire of dried sheep dung was preferable to starving in Ireland. The hope, and frequently the realization, of landownership provided stimulus for continued immigration and, further expansion of sheep raising. An estimated four thousand Irish shepherds in the province of Buenos Aires at the time of the fall of Rosas (1852) increased to 35,000 by the 1870’s, and their labors contributed more than half of Argentina’s wool exports.” (6, page 85).

The consequences of sheep raising and cattle ranching were many. First of all the railroad system was stimulated, because all these products had to reach the coast. Second, the frontiers of the country had to be protected to assure the survival of these “estancias” against the attack of Indians, especially the Araucanian. Third, it stimulated the growth of industries, like packing plants, where all these products could be processed, and of commerce that could ship and transport these products overseas.

“The porte-o sheep economy, therefore, marked the transition from the colonial ‘estancia’ and ‘saladero’ to the modern ‘estancia’ that emerged on the coast in the late nineteenth century. Sheep attracted immigrants and capital, encouraged the conquest and settlement of the pampas and provided a favorable environment for breeding, crops, railroads, and packing plants—in a word, conditions necessary for Argentine beef and wheat supremacy in the twentieth century. In this period of transition much of old Argentina faded and disappeared. The influx of Irish and Basques was swelled by British engineers and managers. French shopkeepers, Italian and Swiss peasants, German laborers, and Jewish refugees totally transforming the Spanish-mestizo origins of the population. The Indian, pushed off the pampas, ceased to figure in coastal Argentina. The gaucho, hemmed by the fences, troops, and immigrants continued to evolve into a rural peon, leaving only a legend behind him.” (6, page 87).

At the same time that these industries were thriving, the urban centers of Argentina were growing and assimilating more and more people. The immigrants that were arriving in large numbers found their first stop and sometimes their last, right there in the cities, especially in Buenos Aires, where their friends and relatives were. In the cities the immigrants found the opportunities, institutions, sociability, and wealth generally

absent in the countryside.

For these poor, often illiterate immigrants, the hope of finding their fortune in this new country was immense and for many this hope came true. But for the majority being able to earn a decent living was sufficient, considering the overcrowding of land and industries at home. The voyage from Europe was long and hard under very unpleasant conditions, but it was also inexpensive, and sometimes, as in the Argentine government's experiment in 1888-1889, even free. And the 'golondrinas', or the 19th century migratory workers, needed to work only two weeks in Argentina to pay for their roundtrip passages. Even the immigrants' hotel, "at first a filthy, unventilated horsebarn in the center of Buenos Aires and after the turn of the century a gloomy, concrete edifice near the northern port area" (6, page 131), provided them with 5 days free room and board. All of these reasons made it easier and easier for the immigrants to come and fulfill their dreams of 'hacer America'.

The cities were growing, and with the growth new jobs were opening: masons, plumbers, carpenters, laborers and then each new neighborhood required its own grocers, milkmen, tailors, bakers, butchers, servants and so on. Together with these existing needs, new ones were brought by the immigrants themselves, and new industries producing pasta, beer, textiles began to flourish.

"The opportunities in the coastal cities reinforced the effects of Argentina's land tenure system by draining off the majority of immigrants to urban occupations, often to services rather than to industries. Even those who initially made their way to the pampas...frequently found their way back to the city. Urban life was crowded and expensive, but it provided social contacts education, color, and activity lacking on the pampas. The poorest might cluster in the 'conventillos'—slums composed of entire blocks in the downtown area burrowed by long corridors and honeycombed with tiny rooms—which developed in Buenos Aires and Rosano in the 1880's. But here their children attended school for a few years at least, and the church, the plaza, and the cafe were just around the corner." (6, page 33).

The immigrant often had the dream of creating his fortune and returning to Europe, but this dream often remained just that, a dream. The immigrant learned to integrate himself in the new society, and national associations tried to soften their adjustment. The Basques, Catalans, Italians and French united in mutual aid societies. The Germans, Italians, British, Spanish and French each had their own hospitals. The Germans and the British even maintained their own school systems. As a rule, however, Europeans nationalities did not isolate themselves by groups, although by 1900 each major immigrant group published at least one daily newspaper in Buenos Aires. (6, page 134).

The Italians and the Spanish had little adjustment to make in terms of religion, language, or food. These first groups adjusted well, and also influenced the culture of the new country with what they contributed. They intermarried readily with Argentines and other immigrant groups, and as the years passed and their local obligations and attachments grew, the dream of returning to their homeland gradually folded—never to disappear completely but to become an impractical wish. The other groups, in much smaller numbers were absorbed by the Latin culture of the country, especially in the large urbanized centers.

In conclusion "further facilitating the process of absorption was the receptive and usually friendly attitude maintained by Argentina toward immigrants, at least until the world depression of the 1930's. European immigrants had always been accorded preferential treatment by Argentina constitutions, treaties and laws. Religious freedom in this predominantly Catholic nation was guaranteed... by the Constitution of 1853. Foreigners might be stereotyped...but rarely were they discriminated against, rejected or isolated because of their nationality. Only occasionally did Argentina react against supposed threats to its Europeanized culture. Proposal

for Chinese or Japanese colonization never received a hearing. The establishment of the Jewish Colonization Association in 1891, and its selection of Argentina as a settlement area for Russian emigres aroused journalists to violent accusations that there was a plot to submerge the nation with two million Jews. ...These accusations kept strains of anti-semitism alive...but never led to active or official persecution. (6, page 192).

This easy integration and acceptance of the immigrants in Argentina came about because of the tolerance that this country demonstrated and for this reason we might be able to call Argentina a true “melting pot”.

Lesson Plans 1, 2, 3

Purpose This Unit is written to supplement the curriculum of the 8th grade Social Studies program, which covers the Western Hemisphere. It is designed to continue the Unit written in 1988 (Vol. II), titled “The American Experience”.

Purpose

1. The same objectives listed in the Unit mentioned above, can be applied to this Unit.
2. A secondary objective is the construction and interpretation of graphs and tables.
 - a. How to read a graph or table.
 - b. How to interpret information from this graph.
 - c. How to compare different parts of the graph.
 - d. How to write a graph.

Vocabulary Study The teacher will facilitate the study of the lesson by identifying and defining any word that might be unfamiliar to the student.

A. Graph A. Net Immigration to Argentina, between 1860-1970.

Questions for the student:

1. Does the graph tell you where did the immigrants come from?
2. How many years of immigration are covered by this graph?
3. Is the graph divided in periods of 5 or 10 years?
4. In what year did Argentina receive the most immigrants? In what year the least?
5. How many immigrants went to Argentina in 1940? Why was the number so low in 1940?

B. Table B. Argentina Population Growth

1. The bar graph contains the same information as the table. Which of the two is easier to read? Which one is more visually effective?
2. When was the first accurate count taken?
3. The population doubled between 1895 and 1914. Between what years did it double again?

4. Did immigration contribute to the growth of the country?
 5. Did immigration contribute to the growth of the United States as well?
- C. Table C. Overseas Immigrants to Argentina by Nationality, 1857-1940.
1. What percentage of the immigrant population is represented by the Italians and Spanish combined?
 2. Which group had the highest percentage after the Italian and Spanish?
 3. Using a map of Europe locate the countries represented by these immigrants.
 4. How many years of immigration does this table represent?
 5. What do you think "other" might represent?

(figure available in print form)

GRAPHS AND TABLES

Graph A. New Immigration to Argentina between 1860 and 1970.

Table B. Argentine population growth.

Year Population (in thousands)

1600	350 (est.)
1700	350 (est.)
1750	400 (est.)
1810	500 test.)

1869	1,800 (1st census)
1895	4,000 (2nd census)
1914	8,000 (3rd census)
1947	16,000 (4th census)
1960	20,000 (5th census)
1970	23,400 (est.)

Table C. Overseas Immigrants to Argentina by Nationality (1857-1940)

Nat .	Immigrants (in thousands)	Per cent
<i>Italian</i>	2,970	44.9%
Spanish	2,080	31.4%
Polish	180	2.7%
Turks	174	2.6%
French	239	3.6%
Russian	177	2.6%
Austro-Hungarian	111	1.6%
German	152	2.2%
Yugoslav	48	0.7%
Portuguese	65	0.9%
Swiss	44	0.6%
Belgian	26	0.3%
British	75	1.1%
Danish	18	0.2%
Dutch	10	0.1%
Swedish	7	0.1%
United States	12	0.1%
Other	223	3.3%
Total	6, 611	

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