



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1996 Volume IV: Remaking America: Contemporary U.S. Immigration

Contemporary Mexican and Puerto Rican Immigration

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As a teacher of foreign languages (mainly Spanish), I often include various aspects of culture and current events in my lesson plans. Quite often, I have found that my students have a negative or erroneous views of immigrants, even though many of their relatives were immigrants themselves. They are usually unaware of the contribution immigrants and their offspring have made to the culture and the economy of the country.

My goal in teaching this unit is to give the students an appreciation of the fact that immigration affects their lives. At the end of the unit, I would like them to be more aware of, and sensitive to Hispanic cultures and to understand that cultural differences are not stupid. The students will be exposed to several reasons why people migrate to different countries. They will be aware of the process of obtaining a visa to enter the USA. The students will talk about the different receptions immigrants receive when they arrive here in the USA. We will discuss the contributions immigrants have made to life and lifestyles here in the USA. In addition to the changes which result from immigration in the country, the immigrants themselves are changed as a result of moving here. The students will also discuss two current “hot” topics that relate to immigration, undocumented immigration (Proposition 187) and bilingual education.

Although this unit is specifically geared to middle school students, it can be modified for high school students. The lessons can be taught in Spanish and Social Studies classes. Most immigrants to the USA are of Mexican origin and the majority of Hispanics in New Haven are Puerto Ricans. The USA has played an integral part in the history and economy of both countries. For the purposes of this unit presentation my focus will be Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants.

Reasons for Migration

Migration is the movement of people from one area to another. There are several reasons why people migrate. Migration can be divided into two categories, voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary immigration is movement by one’s own volition. Involuntary migration implies that movement is not by choice. Possible causes of involuntary migration are wars and religious and ethnic persecution.

In order for our students to comprehend contemporary immigration, they will have to understand some background history of both Puerto Rico and Mexico. I have included some historical background of both countries.

Background History—Mexico

Many of the reasons why Mexicans move to the USA are deeply rooted in Mexico's history with the USA. I have provided a brief historical overview of the Mexican-American relationship.

Prior to February 1848, Mexico included some places that are now part of the USA (including Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and parts of Wyoming and Colorado). In 1821, Anglos began to move into Texas which was still a part of Mexico. In exchange for large portions of land, they had to agree to speak Spanish, become Catholic and follow Mexican laws.

By 1832, there were more Anglos in Texas than Mexicans. They wanted to live by US laws but Mexico insisted that they abide by Mexican laws. Mexico then decided to halt immigration into Texas because it was alarmed at the huge population of Anglos and their political unrest. Led by Stephen Austin, Texas decided to form their own government.

In 1835 fighting started between the Texans and Mexico. In 1836, Mexico was forced to give up Texas and Texas became an independent republic. Mexico did not recognize Texas' new status but the USA did. The Mexicans living in Texas were promised the same rights as the Anglos but this did not prove to be true.

Texas became the 28th state of the USA and soon after the USA and Mexico began to argue about the borders of both countries. The USA said that their border was at the Rio Grande but Mexico contended that the boundaries were at the Nueces River, 100 miles east. In May 1846, the USA declared war on Mexico both to acquire new land and to settle the border dispute.

In February 1848, Mexico and the USA signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to end the war. Mexico agreed to sell California, Nevada, Utah and parts of Wyoming and Colorado to the USA. The USA paid \$15 million for the acquisition. With the signing of this treaty, the USA acquired territory that amounts to approximately one sixth of its current day size. Included in this treaty was a guarantee to the Mexicans living in the areas that they would have the same rights and privileges as USA citizens.

In recent years, Mexicans have migrated to the USA mainly to find jobs. At times the USA has welcomed them especially when they needed cheap labour. The USA has even sponsored programs to recruit Mexican laborers. The Bracero program was started in 1942 because the USA needed extra farm workers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century cheap labour was needed for farms and to build railroads. Mexicans were called upon to fill these jobs because, historically they have been a cheap source of labour for the USA and the fact that the Japanese and Chinese were prohibited from entering the country.

During the Great Depression many Mexicans and their children were forcibly sent back to Mexico because they were thought to be obtaining the jobs the native born should be getting (employment was scarce at the time). They were returned to Mexico even though some of them were American citizens. During this period also, many Mexicans voluntarily returned to Mexico.

Over the course of World War II, Mexicans were again recruited to fill jobs because many American men and Women had become involved in the war effort. In 1942, the "Bracero" program began and before it ended hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers had been employed as temporary farm workers.

Although the program officially ended in 1964, Mexicans and their employers continued their working relationship.

Undocumented Immigration

I will discuss undocumented immigration at this point. Mexicans are currently the largest group of undocumented immigrants to the USA.

Even though The USA is considered to be a nation of immigrants, immigration has been a controversial topic especially during economic recessions. Immigrants are seen as being a big contributor to the loss of economic well-being for the native born. Undocumented immigrants have borne the brunt of this criticism.

America has had a conflicting relationship with immigrants that dates back to the formation of the country. At one time the country had been resistant to Italians and Irish moving here even though they were European. With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, 80% of all new immigrants to the USA have been Asian, African or Latin American. This has been a cause for alarm among many of the native born.

“On one hand we make it possible for them to come to this “nation of immigrants” while on the other hand we fear and resent their perceived threats to our way of life, our jobs, our education system, and our health care system.” (1)

In some ways, native born Americans feel threatened by these new immigrants who are different in appearance, language and culture.

Many undocumented immigrants move here for much the same reasons as legal immigrants. Most have the immigrant dream of making life better for themselves and their families. Some come to join family members already living in the USA. Others come to earn money to return to their countries in a better financial position, while others are fleeing political unrest.

As in California, undocumented immigrants are seen to be obtaining a significant portion of public assistance (welfare, health care and education) without paying enough taxes. More than 80% of undocumented immigrants live in California, New York, Texas, Illinois and Florida. California receives the majority of these immigrants. It is therefore no surprise that Proposition 187 was passed into law in California. With the passage of this law, California hoped to deny certain privileges to undocumented immigrants and their children. These privileges include health care and education, Proposition 187 requires that health care and educational workers verify the immigration status of the people they serve. Therefore, doctors must check for immigration documents before providing services (except in emergencies). Students would need to prove legal status before being admitted to school. This part of the Proposition is being contested in court because these workers do not think that they should be doing the job of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). The only part of the law that is currently being enforced is the felony charge for the sale of fake documents which is punishable by a prison term of five years.

At this time several key provisions of Proposition 187 are being challenged in court and the most of the law have not been implemented. The education provision had been invalidated because the 1982 Supreme Court decision, *Doe v Plyer* stipulated that all children are entitled to a public education even if they are undocumented.. It was argued that education is a unifying force in the USA and to deny education might lead to increased crime and unemployment which might augment the need for more social services.

The debate rages on as to how to control undocumented immigration. It was thought that the Immigration Act of 1986 would have stemmed the flow of undocumented immigrants. In this law, employers were supposed to verify that their employees are eligible to work in the USA. The thinking of Congress then was that, by making

employment of undocumented immigrants virtually impossible, the lure of jobs would have been removed and therefore undocumented migration would be significantly curtailed. This has not proved to be true. There has been a proliferation of fake documents and employers have at times turned a blind eye. There is little enforcement and it is still more economical for many employers to employ undocumented workers as the cost of undocumented labour is cheaper.

Many employers view undocumented workers as a source of cheap labour that is essential to a profitable business. They claim that prices for agricultural products and services would increase if they stopped using undocumented workers. They also contend that without using illegal immigrants, they would have to move more jobs overseas where they can pay the workers a fraction of American wages. According to Lee in her book *Illegal Immigration* a recent study of athletic shoe factories showed, "Legal workers in America can earn between \$7.38 and \$7.95 hourly. Wages in Thailand for the same work range from 65 cents to 74 cents hourly, and in China the wages range from 10 cents to 14 cents hourly." (2) Economics aside, some argue that the native born refuse many of these jobs because of low wages, lack of benefits and prestige.

Background—Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico was discovered by Columbus on November 19, 1493 and he claimed the island for Spain. The island was inhabited by Taino Indians who largely died out soon after Spanish occupation. Several attempts were made to end Spanish domination of the island in 1835, 1838, 1867 and 1868. In 1869, Puerto Rico became a province of Spain and in 1875 slavery was abolished on the island. With Luis Muñoz Marín advocating, Puerto Rico was given an autonomous government in 1897. However this was short-lived, because the Spanish-American War began on April 21, 1898. At the signing of the Treaty of Paris to end the war, Puerto Rico was ceded to the USA.

I have listed and explained some major legislation that have governed USA and Puerto Rican relations.

Foraker Act 1900-1917

Under this act, military rule ended in Puerto Rico. There was duty free trade between both countries. Puerto Rico was exempted from federal taxes and it adopted the US currency. Puerto Ricans were not American citizens and their governor was appointed by the US government and Congress. Puerto Rico would also have a two chamber legislature.

Jones Act 1917

Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship but they could not vote for president. Puerto Rico could have representation in Congress through a Commissioner in the House of Representatives. The Commissioner could advise on issues pertaining to Puerto Rico but could not vote. Male Puerto Ricans were eligible for the draft.

After the USA took control of Puerto Rico, the economy of the country changed. Before many people were engaged in small farming. They cultivated a variety of crops for themselves but also to sell locally. When the Americans arrived many of the small farms were bought and these new plantations only cultivated one crop, coffee or sugar cane for the international market. The farms were mechanized and many workers were displaced. Many of these displaced farmers moved to the city in order to find employment. They were often not successful. This occurrence is well illustrated in the book, *When I was Puerto Rican*. Esmeralda beautifully explains what life was like for her family in the countryside. Later she explains that they moved to the city to find work but eventually moved to New York to find better opportunities.

After the Jones Act made Puerto Ricans citizens of the USA, large numbers of Puerto Ricans moved to the mainland to find better economic opportunities. Initially most settled in New York but later they moved throughout the northeast. As our students can see many of Connecticut's cities have large Puerto Rican populations.

Operation Boot Strap was started by the US government as a way to modernize and industrialize the Puerto Rican economy. With business partnerships, they tried to bring jobs to the island. However the companies could not provide as many jobs as were needed to have a significant impact on the unemployment rate. In addition the jobs that were created were extremely low paying and most of the jobs employed only women which led to even higher male unemployment. It was understood that large numbers of people had to leave the island in order to reduce the unemployment rate.

Many Puerto Ricans were directly recruited to work here on the mainland and specifically in Connecticut. Many came to harvest fruits and pick tobacco. Here they were faced with discrimination, often times uncomfortable working conditions, and often they were exploited. In instances contractual agreements with respect to wages and fringe benefits were not met by employers. As a result, many farm workers left to find better jobs in factories. However as mentioned in the video "Puerto Rican Passages," "They were in the wrong place at the wrong time". The factory jobs and farming industries were in decline. Many of the factories either closed or moved out of the country to find cheaper labour. To read more about Puerto Ricans in Connecticut, I recommend reading Ruth Glasser's manuscript *Agui Me Quedo - Puerto Ricans in Connecticut*. Another excellent source is the video *Puerto Rican Passages*". It gives a historical and contemporary view of Puerto Ricans in Connecticut.

Puerto Rican Migration is somewhat unique because of its circular pattern. Many Puerto Ricans participate in life both here and on the island. When the economic conditions are good on the mainland they move to the mainland. When there is an economic downturn many return to the island. This type of migration is made easy because of geographic proximity to the mainland. Other factors include cheap and abundant transportation and because of their citizenship there are no legal barriers to re-entry to the mainland.

Bilingual Education

As a part of this unit, the students will be discussing the merits of bilingual education. We will discuss the reasons why this program was instituted and how it has fared over the years.

"Bilingual education was intended to give new immigrants a leg up. During earlier waves of immigration, children who entered American schools without speaking English were left to fend for themselves. Many thrived, but others, feeling lost and confused, did not. Their failures led to Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which ensured supplementary services for all non-English speaking newcomers to America." (3)

There are two schools of thought pertaining to English language acquisition in the USA.

"It comes down to whether you think of America as a "melting pot" (traditional assimilation, in which all citizens, including newest immigrants, are expected to replace their native tongue with English) or a "salad bowl," in which immigrants retain their individual "flavors" even as they blend with the general population." (4)

In the "melting pot" students would be placed in immersion programs where they were taught only in English. In the "salad bowl" the students would be taught in the native language while being taught English.

There are conflicting views on how well bilingual programs have worked. However there is a general

consensus that

“ . . . children learn English faster and are more likely to excel academically if they are given several years of instruction in their native language first.” (5) However many bilingual programs are failing to adequately prepare students to be integrated into mainstream classes. Recently a group of New York parents sued to get their children removed from bilingual programs because they claimed it was not working.

With the rise of “English only” sentiments, bilingual education has become a ripe political issue. This issue has come to the forefront partly because of anti-immigration sentiments and perhaps racism.

“What worries many Americans are efforts to put other languages on par with English, which often come across as assaults on American or Western culture. Americans may relish an evening at a Thai restaurant or an afternoon at a Greek festival, but many are less comfortable when their children are celebrating Cinco de Mayo, Kwanzaa and Chinese New Year along with Christmas in the public schools.” (6)

There have been several experiments with dual language schools that have been very promising. English speakers and non-English speakers are paced in a classroom that is taught half the time in English and the other half in a second language. This type of program has proved successful for both sets of students. The non-English speakers learn the language faster and the English speakers also acquired second language skills at a faster rate. In a global economy, it is imperative that people have second language skills. Knowing a second language might prove invaluable in finding a job.

This unit is designed to last for three to four weeks. It will cover reasons for Puerto Rican and Mexican immigration to the United States. The students will also be discussing and writing about two controversial issues pertaining to immigration, undocumented immigration and bilingual education

LESSON I

Objective To introduce the concept of immigration to the students

The students will become familiar with ways that immigration affects their lives.

Activities

Using the dictionary the students will define terms such as “immigrant”, “immigration” and “migrate”.

The students will brainstorm ways that immigration has affected life here in the USA. (It might help the students focus more if you give them categories such as food, names of places in the USA, entertainment, celebrities and holidays celebrated in the USA.)

LESSON II

Objective *To create a questionnaire with which to interview an immigrant to the USA.*

Activities *The students will suggest questions that they would like to ask an immigrant to the USA. The questions might include:*

When and why did you move here?

What type of reception did you get when arrived?

What are some of the differences and similarities between your native country and the USA?

Has living here changed you in any way? Did you have to learn English when you moved?

The students will share the results of their questionnaires with the class.

The students will look for similarities and differences in their responses.

To make this interview more personal for the students, they could use this as an opportunity to explore their own immigrant past.

Objective *The students will explore how immigration has affected their own families.*

Activities *The students will interview their relatives. They will try to discover if they had relatives who moved to the USA. They will try to find out what life was like for them when they moved here. If they have any family stories and anecdotes, they can share them with the class.*

LESSON III

Objective *The students will pretend that they are about to migrate to another country. They will try to decide what they would bring and what they would leave behind.*

Activities *Give the students a picture of an open suitcase. The students will cut out pictures of things they would like to bring to their new country. The students will paste the items in the suitcase and label the items in Spanish.*

Variations *The students could write 2 paragraphs about the reasons why they chose the items for the suitcase.*

LESSON IV

Objectives *The students will learn the major causes of Mexican and Puerto Rican immigration.*

Strategy *These two topics should be taught on separate days.*

Activity *First the students should locate the two countries on the map.*

They will suggest the types of transportation used to come to the USA.

They will brainstorm reasons why each group has moved to the USA.

After a brief lecture on the reasons why each group has moved, the students will list the major reasons why each group has moved to the USA.

LESSON V

Objective *The students will write a five paragraph persuasive essay.*

Strategy *The teacher will have already taught about the differing views on bilingual education and English only laws.*

Activities *The teacher will help the students to make webs for and against bilingual education. Using the ideas from the webs the students will write a five paragraph essay for or against bilingual education. The students will follow the guidelines for the Connecticut Mastery Test.*

LESSON VI

Objective *The students will debate the merits of Proposition 187.*

Strategy *The teacher will have already taught about the provisions in the Proposition 187 law. The teacher will make the students aware of the controversy the law.*

Activities *The students will be divided into two groups, one for and the other against the law. They will decide the merits of their side or the argument. Then, they will choose 2 people from group to debate the issue with the other team.*

LESSON VII

Objective *The students will recognize the contributions of Hispanics to the USA.*

Activity *The students will give a 3 minute report on an immigrant or child of an immigrant. They could use examples of people in entertainment, sports and politics. Please encourage the students to include local business and civic leaders.*

LESSON VIII

Objective *The students will learn about and celebrate 2 Hispanic holidays.*

Activities *The class will plan celebrations for Three King's Day and Cinco de Mayo.*

It would be best to celebrate the events at the specific time of year that they occur.

LESSON IX

Objective *The students will prepare various types of Spanish foods to share with each other.*

Activities *The students will prepare the food at home. After eating, the students could learn 2 contemporary Spanish songs or learn to do the "salsa".*

These activities could be a culminating activity for the unit.

NOTES

1. Chavez, Leo. "Borders and Bridges". *Origins and Destinies* . comp. Pedraza, S. and Rumbaut, R. Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1996. p251.
2. Lee, Kathleen. *Illegal Immigration* . Lucent Books Inc. 1996. p48.
3. "Tongue-Tied in the Schools". *US News and World Report* , September 25,1995. p44
- 4 "Bilingual Education: Melting Pot or Salad Bowl". *The Education Digest* , March 1995. p53.
5. "Should Bilingual Schools Be Silenced". *Time* , October 9, 1995. p49.
6. "Tongue-Tied in the Schools". *US News and World Report* , September 25, 1995. p41.

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1. Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* . Algonquin Books, 1991.

This book tells of a Dominican immigrant family and their assimilation in the USA. This book might be more appropriate for high school students and it contains objectionable language.

2. Anderson, Kelly C. *Immigration* . Lucent Books Inc. 1996.

This book gives an overview of immigration in the USA. It discusses immigrant contributions, undocumented immigration and assimilation.

3. Glasser, Ruth. *Aqui Me Quedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut* . Unpublished manuscript. July 1992.

This manuscript gives an excellent account of Puerto Ricans in CT. It begins with a historical overview and ends with the present day Puerto Rican presence.

4. Lee, Kathleen. *Illegal Immigration* . Lucent Books Inc. 1996.

This book discusses the cultural and economic effects of undocumented immigration. It also suggests possible remedies.

5. Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I Was Puerto Rican* . Addison Wesley, 1993.

An excellent account of the migration of a Puerto Rican family from the countryside of Puerto Rico and eventually to New York.

6. Szumski, Bonnie. *Immigration: Identifying Propaganda Techniques* . Greenhaven Press, 1989.

This book gives opposing view points on immigration and the students have to decide which propaganda techniques are being used.

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1. Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* . Algonquin Books, 1991.

This book tells of a Dominican immigrant family and their process of assimilation in the USA. It identifies the struggles of assimilation and the desire to keep parts of their lives from the Dominican Republic.

2. Anderson, Kelly C. *Immigration* . Lucent Books Inc. 1996

This book gives a historical and contemporary view of immigration. It discusses immigrant contributions, illegal immigration and refugees. It also discusses assimilation, “salad bowl” or “melting pot”.

3. Barbour, Scott (ed.). *Immigration Policy* . Greenhaven Press, 1995.

A compilation of essays with opposing view points on immigration.

4. Calavita, Kitty. “U.S. Immigration and Policy Responses: The Limits of Legislation”. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* . comp. Cornelius, W. Martin. P., Hollifield, J., Stanford University Press, 1995.

The essay examines the contradictions in US immigration policies and lack of enforcement.

5. Chavez, Leo. *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* . Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1992.

This is an excellent book on the lives of undocumented workers in California. It includes many personal accounts of these immigrants.

6. Falcon, Luis M. “Migration and Development: The Puerto Rican Case”. Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative and Economic Development. February, 1990.

This study examines the circular migration pattern of Puerto Ricans in the context of economics.

7. Foner, Nancy (ed.). *New Immigrants in New York* . Columbia University Press, 1987.

A collection of essays about the immigrant presence in New York.

8. Glasser, Ruth. *Aqui Me Quedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut*. Unpublished manuscript. July 1992.

This manuscript gives an excellent account of Puerto Rican living in CT. It begins with the very first Puerto Ricans in the state and discusses the present day Puerto Rican presence.

9. Lee, Kathleen. *Illegal Immigration* . Lucent Books Inc. 1996.

Undocumented immigration. It also suggests some possible remedies.

10. Pedraza, S. and Rumbaut, R. *Origins and Destinies.: Immigration: Race and Ethnicity in America* . Wadsworth Publishing, 1996.

A collection of essays about immigration and race. Several essays provide a historical view of immigration in the USA.

11. Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* . Bantam Books, 1988.

This book provides a controversial view of bilingual education and affirmative action.

12. Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I was Puerto Rican* . Addison Wesley, 1993.

An excellent account of the migration of a Puerto Rican family from the countryside of Puerto Rico and eventually to New York.

13. Szumski, Bonnie. *Immigration: Identifying Propaganda Techniques* . Greenhaven Press, 1989.

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