

Mexican Immigration to the United States

1900–1999

A Unit of Study for Grades 7–12

Kelly Lytle Hernandez

**PREVIEW COPY
INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON**

Prepared for:
America's History in the Making
Oregon Public Broadcasting

This lesson may not be resold or redistributed.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
University of California, Los Angeles

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.

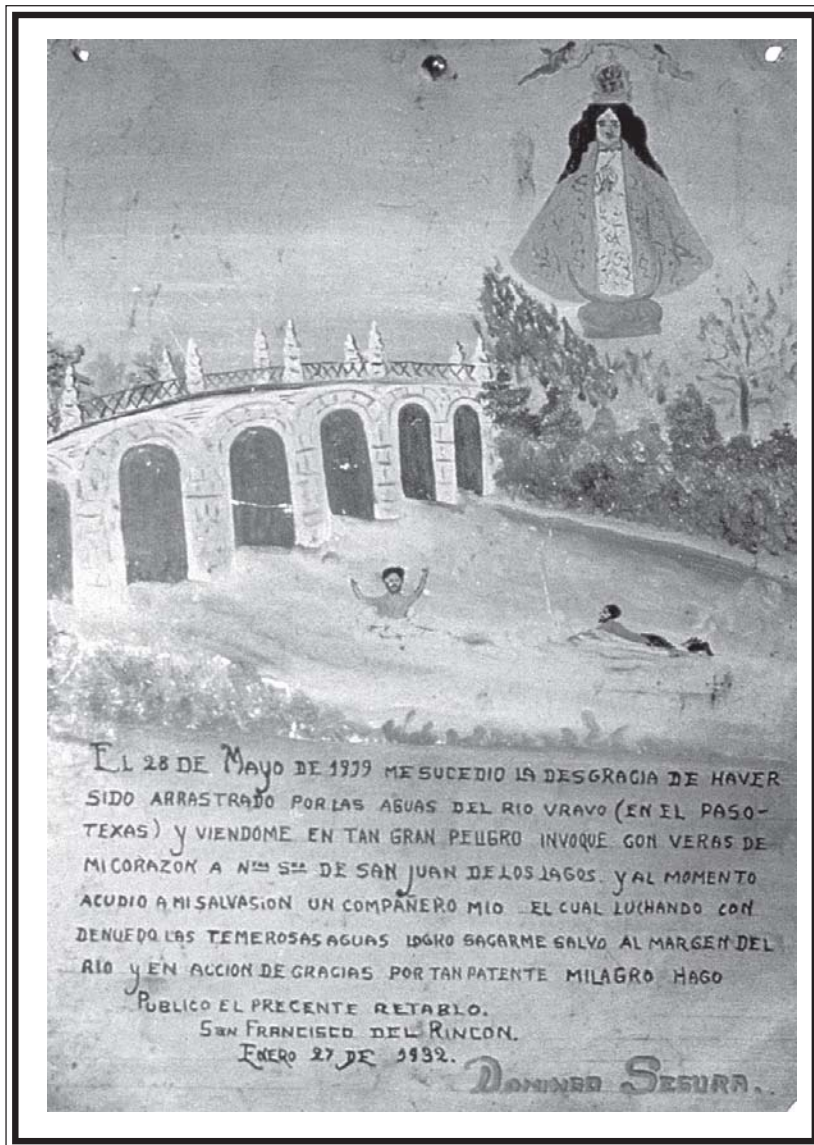
IV. Unit Objectives

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

Lesson One



Mexican Immigration to the United States 1900-1999

Retalbo of Domingo Segura (January 29, 1932)

This retalbo expresses thanks to “Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos” for being rescued from a near drowning in the Rio Grande, El Paso Texas. The Rio Grande runs along the Texas-Mexico border and thus is a site of border crossings. A *retalbo* is painting on tin with sacred images offered as thanks for a safe journey. The *retalbos* in this unit each reflect a different period of Mexican immigration to the United States and some of the struggles faced while crossing the border or working as an undocumented laborer in the United States.

Retalbo courtesy of *Miracles on the Border: Retalbos of Migrants to the United States* by Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey, © 1995, The Arizona Board of Regents. Reprinted by permission of the University of Arizona Press. Color versions of the retalbo and the accompanying prose are available in the book.

Lesson One

Mexican Immigration to the United States 1900–1999

A. Organizing Question

1. What were the push-pull factors that influenced Mexican immigration to the United States during the 20th century?

B. Objectives

- ◆ To understand the “push-pull” dynamic of immigration.
- ◆ To apply the “push-pull” theory to Mexican immigration to the U.S. in the 20th century.

C. Lesson Activities

Explain “push” and “pull” factors to the students:

Men and women take many social and economic conditions into consideration before leaving their homes and immigrating to another country. Difficult conditions known as “push factors,” such as poverty, unemployment, or political repression may encourage people to leave their home countries, or *emigrate*; “pull factors,” such as access to jobs and religious freedom attract them to enter and live in a different country, or *immigrate* to that country. These “push-pull” factors provide a useful model for understanding why people immigrate.

Day One

1. Divide the class into three groups. Each group will be responsible for reading and reporting on one of the three historical summaries of Mexican immigration to the United States. Each summary covers a different time period in the 20th century. Historical Summary Part One (**Student Handout One**) begins in 1900 and ends in 1941. Historical Summary Part Two (**Student Handout Two**) begins in 1942 and ends in 1965. Historical Summary Part Three (**Student Handout Three**) ranges from 1966 to 1999. Ask each group to read its assigned historical summary and discuss the following questions for their time period.
 - a. What “push factors” encouraged Mexican emigrants to leave their home country?
 - b. What “pull factors” attracted Mexican immigrants to the United States?
 - c. What laws, policies, and programs have encouraged or discouraged Mexican immigration to the U.S.?

Lesson One

After the groups have had time to read their historical summary and discussed their answers to the questions above, have the group members fill out a graphic organizer (**Student Handout Four**) that lists the push and pull factors of Mexican immigration to the United States for their assigned time period. Then the group must select a reporter or a team to present the information they have learned to the class. Finally, each group must select two recorders to carefully listen to the other two groups' presentations and fill out graphic organizers for the periods that they did not read about. At the end of this activity, each group should have three graphic organizers reviewing the push and pull factors of Mexican immigration for each of the three historical summaries.

Key to Vocabulary

Student Handout One

<i>campesino</i>	rural farmer
<i>deport</i>	send out of the country
<i>ejido</i>	a piece of land with communal ownership
<i>emigrate</i>	leave one's country to live in another
<i>immigrate</i>	enter a country of which one is not native in order to reside there.
<i>repatriate</i>	return to the country and/or citizenship of origin

Student Handout Two

<i>bilateral</i>	affecting two sides equally; two-sided
<i>Bracero Program</i>	1942 federal program which filled wartime farm labor shortages by allowing growers to bring in Mexican nationals as "guest workers"
<i>United States Border Patrol</i>	the national police force assigned to prevent undocumented immigration

Student Handout Three

<i>Immigration Act of 1965</i>	National law that abolished the national origins quota system for granting immigrant visas. Under national origins, the number of people from a given country already living in the United States determined the number of future immigrants. The new law established allocation of immigrant visas on a first come, first served basis, subject to certain exceptions. As a result, the U.S. immigrant population since 1965 has been much more diverse than it was previously.
--------------------------------	--

<i>Immigration Reform and Control Act</i>	1986 law which was passed in order to control and deter undocumented immigration to the United States. Its major provisions stipulate legalization
---	--

of undocumented aliens who had been continuously unlawfully present since 1982, legalization of certain agricultural workers, sanctions for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, and increased enforcement at U.S. borders.

Operation Hold the Line

an action initially performed by U.S. Border Patrol in 1993 during which agents formed a human blockade—more than 400 agents and vehicles, posted every 100 yards from one end of El Paso to the other—that would discourage people from attempting to cross.

peso devaluation

lowering the value of the peso (the Mexican dollar)

Proposition 187

a law passed by California voters on November 8, 1994 which denied public benefits to undocumented aliens in that state.

undocumented immigration

entering a country without documents representing permission to enter such as travel, work, or student visas

Day Two

1. Have the students create graphs based upon the data tables as follows:

Graph 1: Document 1–A, Part 1

Graph 2: Document 1–A, Part 2

Graph 3: Document 1–A, Part 3

Graph 4: Document 1–B

Graph 5: Document 1–C, years 1942–1965

Graph 6: Document 1–C, years 1966–1999

Have the students use spreadsheet software, if available, or graph paper. (See sample graphs on pages 11–13) If desired, divide the students into groups and have each group complete one graph.

2. After the graphs are complete, have the students come back together as a class. Guide the students to compare their graphs with the information on their graphic organizers from **Day One**. In this activity the students should be able to identify how the social, political, and economic push and pull factors led to ebbs and flows in Mexican immigration to the United States.

NOTE: Many who become immigrants each year are already living in the United States under a temporary visa or under some other legal status, or as undocumented aliens. Also, legislation changes sometimes skew immigration statistics for certain

Lesson One

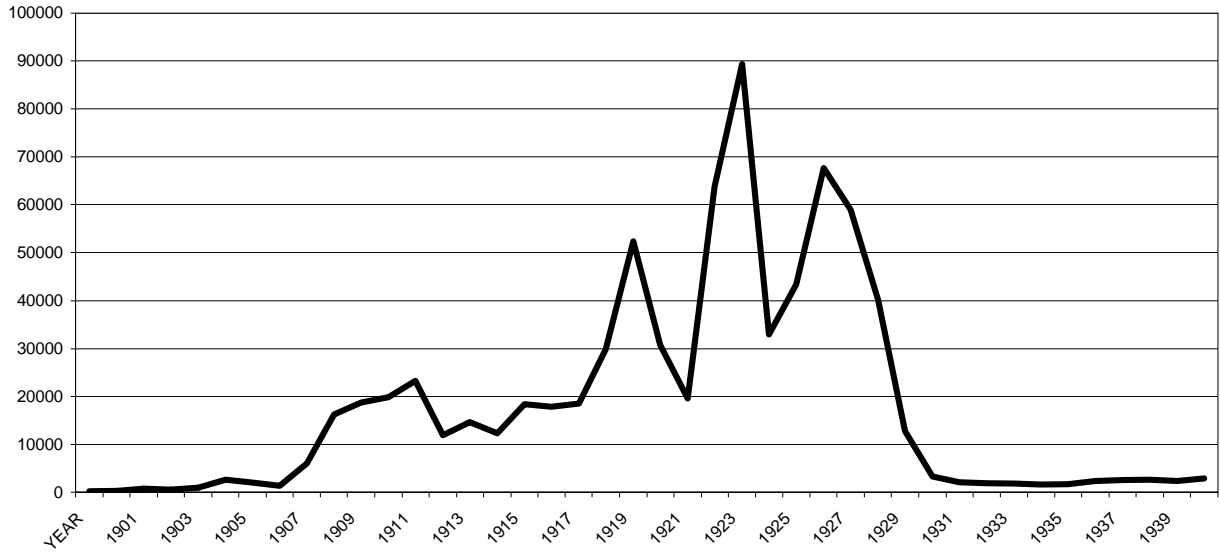
years. For example, the year 1991 marked their change to legal immigrant status under legalization programs in 1987 and 1988.* Guide students to identify overall trends and the corresponding push and pull causes.

*Population Reference Bureau, <www.prb.org>

3. Use the following questions to guide the class discussion:
 - a) What is the overall trend of Mexican immigration to the U.S. in the 20th century?
 - b) What push/pull factors that you have learned about explain the rise and fall of Mexican immigration to the U.S. in the 20th century?
 - c) Which factors that you read about contributed to the rise of undocumented immigration from Mexico?

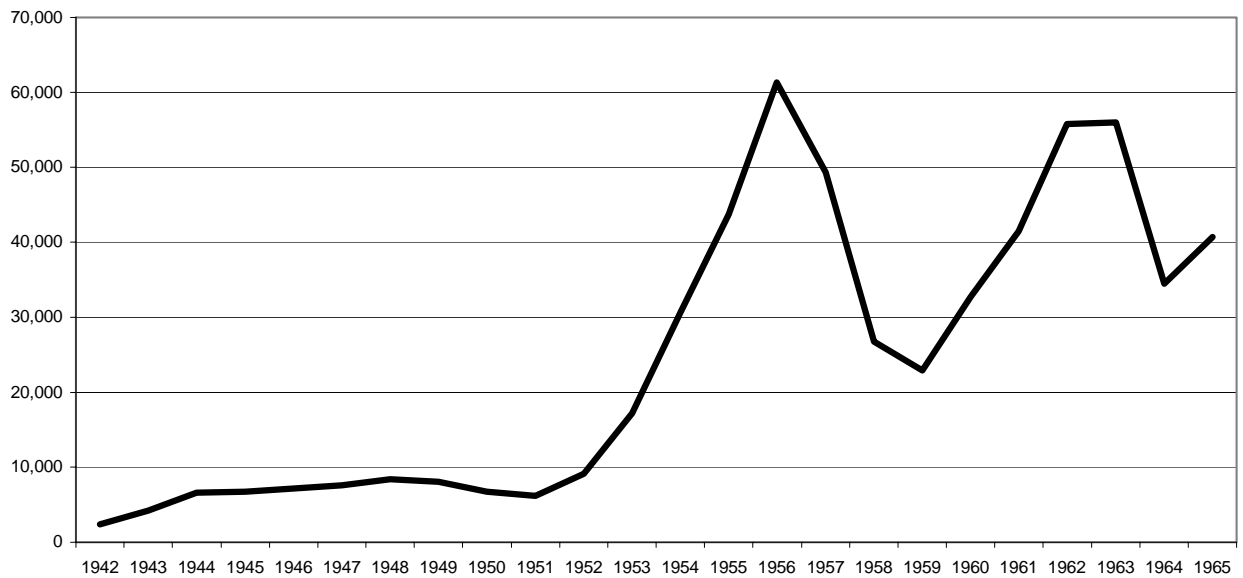
Document 1–A (Part 1)

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1900–1941



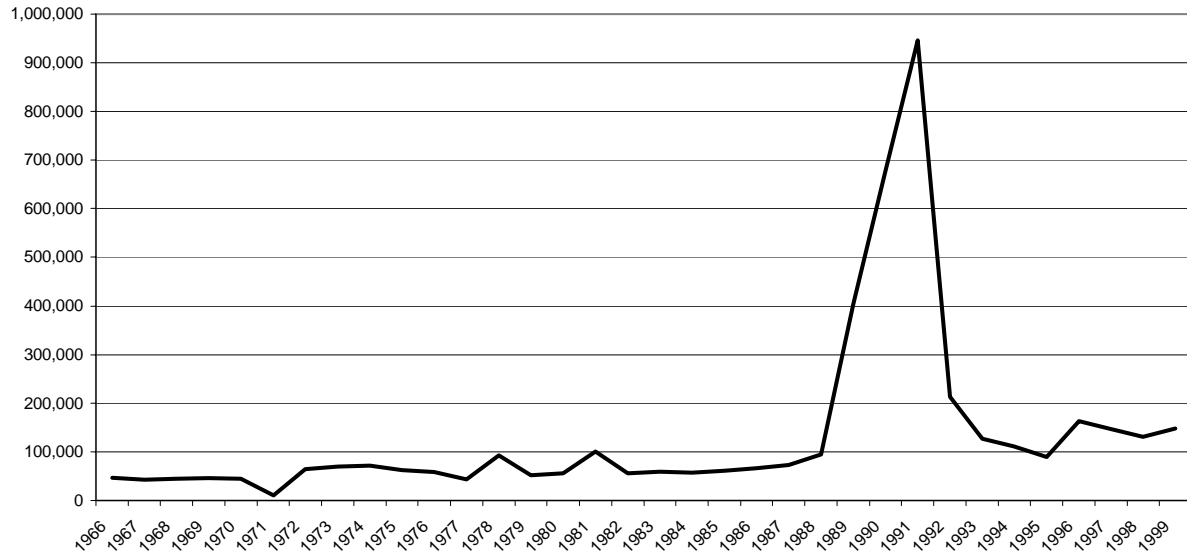
Document 1–A (Part 2)

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1942–1965



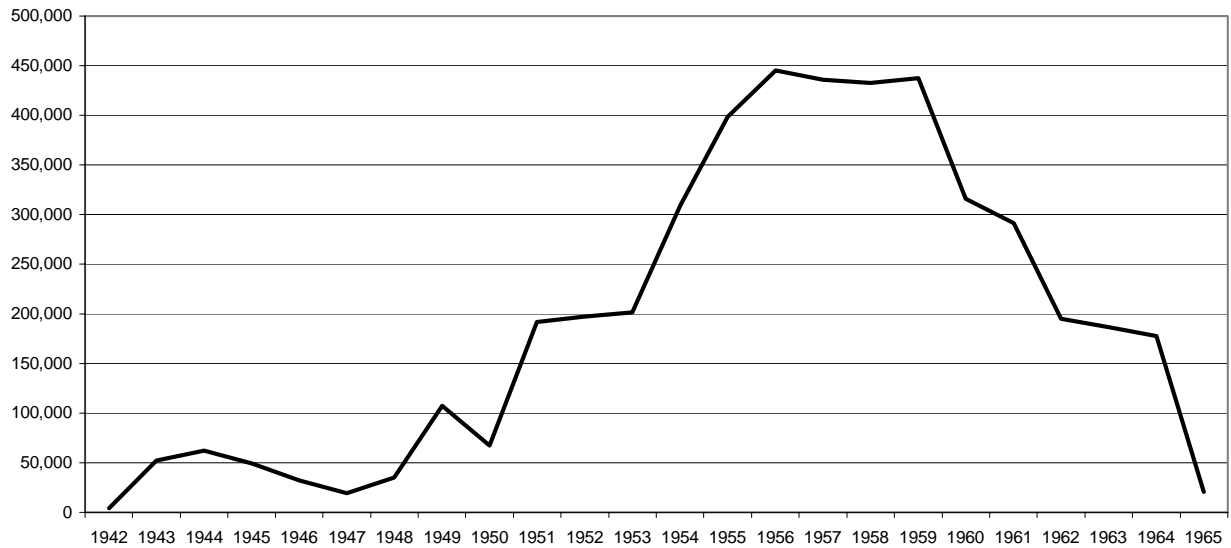
Document 1–A (Part 3)

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1966–1999



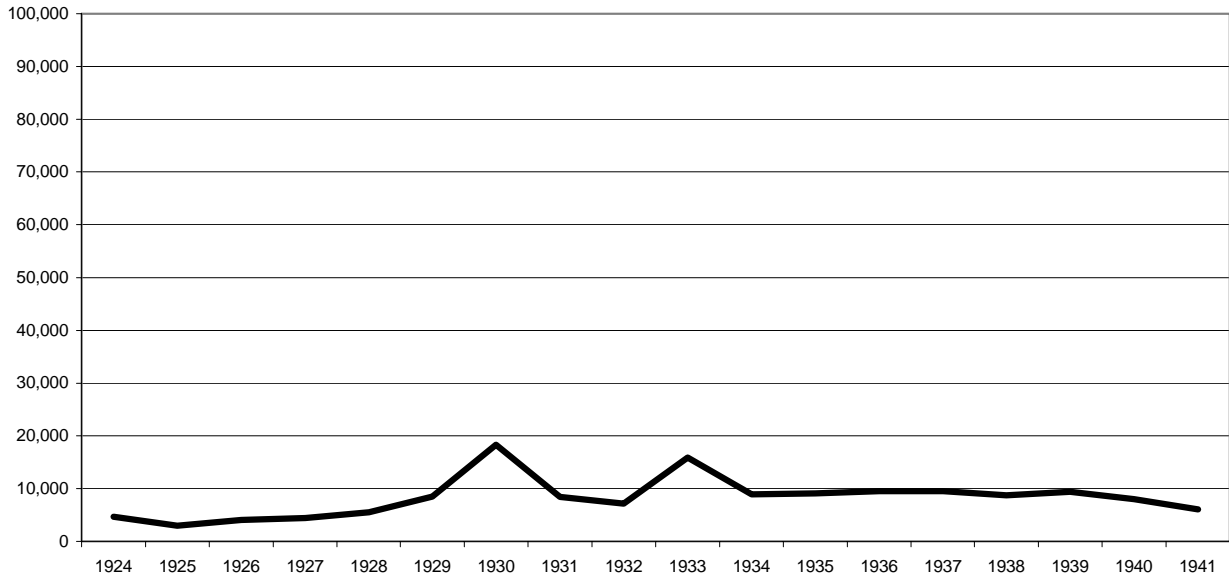
Document 1–B

Numbers of Braceros Admitted Annually, 1942–1965



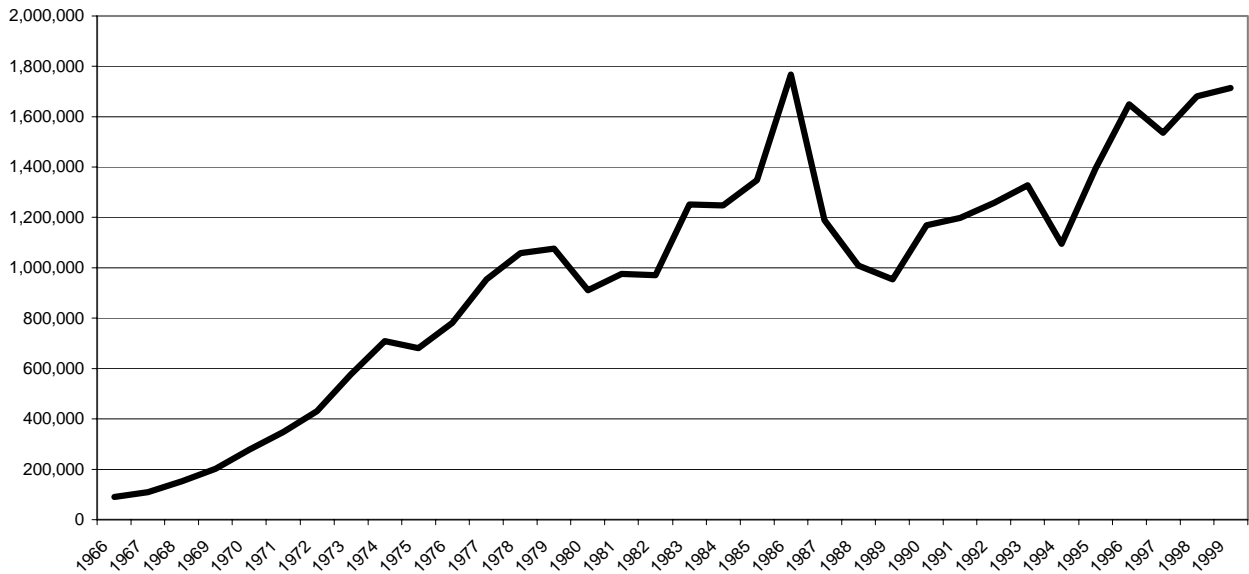
Document 1-C, years 1942-1965

Number of Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol, 1942-1965



Document 1-C, years 1942-1965

Number of Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol, 1966-1999



Historical Summary Part One

1900 to 1941

Throughout the 19th century, much of Mexico's population lived and worked on communally owned lands called *ejidos*. But, when Porfirio Díaz became President of Mexico in 1880, he began confiscating the *ejidos* to sell the land to large land development companies. Without *ejidos*, the Mexican rural population, or *campesinos*, were forced into low wage work on ranches, railroads, and in mines. The devastating blow of the end of the *ejidos* to rural Mexican life was compounded by a population explosion between 1875 and 1910 that increased the Mexican population by 50 percent. The population boom created a labor surplus that depressed wages during a period of drastic inflation on basic foodstuffs. Therefore, at the turn of the century, removal from the land, a large labor surplus, low wages, and high prices on basic foods "pushed" many *campesinos* out of Mexico. In 1910, the Mexican Revolution ousted Porfirio Díaz from power but created chaos and violence until the political conditions of the country stabilized in 1920. Between 1910 and 1920, the revolution induced thousands more to leave Mexico. War refugees impoverished by the ensuing economic turmoil, many Mexicans migrated north to work in the rapidly developing agricultural regions of the southwestern United States.

Viable irrigation systems established in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California in the early 20th century helped to usher in a massive agricultural boom as land owners planted cotton, citrus, and beet crops. The resulting need for labor to harvest the fields was met by the thousands of *campesinos* fleeing poverty and war in Mexico. Higher wages and political stability drew *campesinos* north across the border. Throughout the 20th century, Mexicans composed over 80 percent of the "army" of migrant laborers that moved between harvests throughout the Southwest, making the immigrant labor pool indispensable.

Mexican immigration to the United States continued to grow until the 1929 when the Great Depression reversed the pattern of Mexican immigration. Although the "push" factor of poverty in Mexico did not end during the Great Depression, the "pull" factor of higher wages in the U.S. evaporated as large growers turned to poor American families instead of Mexicans to harvest their crops. Soon after the Great Depression began, Mexicans who had once been sought for their cheap labor became seen as economic competition. Mexicans quickly found themselves unwelcome in the United States and began to return home to Mexico. During the Great Depression, the annual flow of Mexican immigration to the United States contracted until more Mexicans were repatriated and deported out of the United States than those who immigrated into the United States. Therefore, the Great Depression marks an end in the first stage of Mexican immigration to the United States. Not until World War II sparked an upswing in the U.S. economy did Mexican immigration to the United States begin to increase again.

Vocabulary Words

campesinos

emigrate

deport

immigrate

ejidos

repatriate



Mexican emigrating to U.S.
Nuevo Laredo, Mexico
Library of Congress
LC-USZ62-97491 (ca. 1912)



Inspecting a freight train from
Mexico for smuggled immigrants.
El Paso, Texas

Library of Congress
LC-USF34-018222-E (June 1938)
Dorothea Lange, photographer

Historical Summary Part Two 1942–1965

In 1941 the United States entered World War II, jumpstarting the American economy out of the Great Depression. Mobilization for the war touched every sector of the American economy and placed new demands upon American agriculture. The United States government asked growers to rapidly produce more fruits, vegetables, and cotton to support the war effort at home and abroad. With American men and women employed in the higher wage industrial sectors or serving in the Armed Services, southwestern growers argued that they required more immigrant labor from Mexico to fulfill the nation's production needs. To help growers secure steady labor from Mexico, officials of the United States government approached the Mexican government about the possibility of formally facilitating short-term Mexican immigration to the United States. After considerable debate about the pros and cons of reopening the pathways of Mexican labor migration to the United States, in August 1942 the Mexican government agreed to allow the U.S. government to contract Mexican laborers to work on southwestern farms and railroads on short-term contracts for the duration of the war. The government-to-government, or bilateral, agreement was called the Bracero Program.

U.S. and Mexican officials intended the Bracero Program to stimulate and regulate the immigration of Mexican laborers to the United States. For example, Mexican workers who entered the United States as members of the Bracero program (known as Braceros) were guaranteed a basic labor contract with benefits, such as a minimum wage, health insurance, and adequate housing. Also, Braceros were prohibited from working in any industries other than those where a significant labor need existed, specifically agriculture and railroads. The Bracero Program did successfully initiate a new phase of regulated Mexican immigration, but the program's poor implementation also sparked a dramatic increase in unregulated immigration, otherwise known as undocumented immigration.

Bracero contracts were limited in number and often difficult to obtain. For example, the number of Bracero contracts available varied from year to year and was determined by calculating how many additional non-domestic laborers were needed during any given harvest period. The number of Mexican laborers who desired to work in the United States consistently outnumbered the number of Bracero contracts available. Also, not all Mexican workers were eligible for the Bracero Program since the Mexican government required Braceros applicants to be from a region experiencing serious unemployment. Braceros also had to be at least 14 (there was no upper age limit though older workers and women could legally be paid lower wages), meet certain health requirements, and have previous experience as an agricultural laborer.

Even though many Mexican workers were eligible, the process of successfully securing a Bracero contract was difficult and expensive to undertake. For example, to secure a Bracero contract, prospective Braceros had to travel to official recruitment centers in Mexico. The recruitment centers were often far, and Mexican officials frequently demanded bribes for contracts. The significant number of Mexican workers who were either ineligible for the Bracero Program or unable to undertake the process of securing a Bracero contract began to bypass the program entirely and head north

outside of the control of and to the irritation of both the U.S. and Mexican governments. These workers soon found a loophole in the Bracero Program's implementation that worked to their advantage—if they were apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol after illegally entering the United States and while working on a U.S. farm, undocumented Mexican immigrants could simply secure a Bracero contract from U.S. officials. This loophole combined with the abundance of Mexican laborers seeking work in the U.S. created a situation in which U.S. Border Patrol apprehension statistics steadily climbed until Border Patrol officers were arresting more Mexicans for illegally entering the U.S. than Braceros were being contracted to work in the United States from Mexico.

Although the Bracero Program was intended to be a short-term wartime program, by 1945 when World War II ended, U.S. and Mexican officials decided to keep the Bracero Program in place, but dramatically reduced the number of Braceros contracts available to Mexican workers. Despite the reduction in Bracero contracts, Mexican workers continued to migrate north for work outside of the parameters of the Bracero Program and outside of the control of U.S. and Mexican officials. When the U.S. entered the Korean War in 1951, the U.S. and Mexican governments began to offer more



Waiting outside the soccer stadium in Mexico City. According to Farm Security Administration employee Hilda Mayer, many had been waiting for five days since hearing of the opportunity to work in the United States.

Howard R. Rosenberg, "Snapshots in a Farm Labor Tradition,"
Labor Management Decisions, Volume 3, No. 1 (Winter-Spring, 1993).

Available: < http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/winterspring_93/snapshots.html>

Bracero contracts to Mexican workers because the United States was once again experiencing a need for agricultural laborers. The increase was greater than had been experienced during World War II. The numbers continued to rise through 1959; after that, the number of Bracero contracts offered to Mexican agricultural workers began to decline, in part due to the mechanization in cotton and sugar beet production, but also because significant political resistance to the program had developed in the United States and Mexico that would eventually lead to the program's demise in 1965.



Processing forms for the Bracero Program.

Howard R. Rosenberg,
 "Snapshots in a Farm Labor Tradition," *Labor Management
 Decisions*, Volume 3, No. 1 (Winter-Spring, 1993).
 Available:
 < [http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/
 winterspring_93/snapshots.html](http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/winterspring_93/snapshots.html) >

While many Mexican officials saw the Bracero Program as an important policy for reducing poverty in Mexico and maintaining strong foreign relations with the United States, others resented the exodus of Mexican laborers to the United States. In the United States, organized labor opposed the Bracero Program because they believed that Braceros lowered wages. Even southwestern growers disagreed over the usefulness of the program. Many supported the program because it filled their labor needs, while others resented having to agree to Bracero contracts that guaranteed workers such provisions as a minimum wage. Braceros themselves had mixed experiences with the program. Some experienced abuse and discrimination, particularly after 1954 when the United States failed to strictly enforce the provisions of the Bracero contract, while others were able to accomplish their goal of earning good wages.

Although the availability to Bracero contracts waxed and waned over time, throughout the period significant wage differentials between Mexico and the United States was a continuous enticement to migrate north for better wages. Therefore, a decreased availability of Bracero contracts often simply led to increased undocumented immigration.

This undocumented immigration disturbed both U.S. and Mexican officials both of whom had their own reasons for wanting to strictly regulate the movement of Mexican laborers to the United States. Daily undocumented entries of Mexican laborers reaffirmed the porous character of U.S. borders. American officials worried about border security during the World War II and, later, during the Cold War. For Mexico's part, many Mexican employers protested losing their sources of cheap labor to northern competitors and Mexican officials worried that Mexican laborers would be exploited in the United States if not protected by the Bracero contract. Neither the U.S nor Mexico wished to see the rate of undocumented immigration grow.

The Mexican government placed significant pressure on the United States to aggressively deport all undocumented Mexican immigrants living in the United States as a prerequisite for allowing the Bracero Program to continue after World War II. After the war, the United States Border Patrol experimented with new law enforcement tactics not only for patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent illegal entries, but also for detecting, arresting, and deporting undocumented Mexican immigrants who had successfully entered the country. The Border Patrol's aggressive deportation campaign climaxed in the summer of 1954 with the implementation of Operation Wetback. During Operation

Wetback, the Border Patrol assigned most of its officers to the U.S.-Mexico border region to apprehend undocumented Mexican immigrants living in the border states. By the end of 1954 they had apprehended and deported over 1,000,000 undocumented immigrants. Operation Wetback outraged many U.S. growers who believed that they depended upon informal and undocumented immigration. The Border Patrol and other Immigration officials helped, encouraged, and often intimidated growers into using Braceros rather than undocumented workers. U.S. officials had hoped that Operation Wetback would successfully discourage Mexicans from illegally entering the U.S. and encourage American employers to use legal sources of labor, but several years later, Border Patrol apprehension statistics began to rise again indicating that undocumented immigration from Mexico continued despite their efforts.

The Bracero Program and undocumented immigration were uneasy siblings. The Bracero Program was intended to be the centerpiece of Mexican immigration policy. In many ways, it was. It reignited the migration of Mexican workers north for short-term employment. However, the program's poor implementation, the tendency to prefer the ease of hiring undocumented workers rather than Braceros, and the surplus of Mexican workers migrating north eventually made undocumented labor the Bracero Program's constant companion. Even so, the Bracero Program survived longer than anyone had intended. It was designed as an emergency wartime effort; yet it did not end until 1965, two decades after the final battles of World War II were fought. Many students of Mexican immigration argue that today's flow of undocumented immigration can be traced back to the networks that the Bracero Program built between U.S. employers and Mexican laborers.

Vocabulary Words

bilateral

Bracero Program

United States Border Patrol

Historical Summary Part Three 1966–1999

The Immigration Act of 1965 ushered in a new era of Mexican immigration. Under the National Origins Act of 1924 no limits had been placed on annual immigration from the Western Hemisphere. The 1965 Act, however, imposed a numerical limit upon immigrants allowed to enter the United States from the western hemisphere (South America, Central America, Caribbean, Mexico, and Canada). Only 120,000 persons from the western hemisphere were allowed to legally immigrate to the United States per year. An important exception to the new numerical limits, the spouse, unmarried children and parents of United States citizens could immigrate to the United States regardless of the numerical limit.

Thus, for the first time in U.S. history, limits were placed on the annual number of Mexicans who could legally immigrate to the United States. Shortly after the Immigration Act was fully implemented in 1968, a series of crises struck the Mexican economy that pressured many Mexican families to continue migrating north despite the new immigration restrictions. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants disregarded the new limits placed on legal Mexican immigration and continued the pattern of seeking short-term employment in the U.S. They waded across the Rio Grande into Texas, jumped border fences in California, braved the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico, or falsified immigration papers.

The Mexican economy grew steadily between 1970 and 1974—but by 1976 substantial inflation and devaluation of the Mexican peso thrust many families into uncertain financial conditions. Beginning in the early 1980s and steadily worsening over the decade, an expanding foreign debt and dropping oil prices further crippled the Mexican economy anew. Finally, in 1994, a series of political assassinations and an armed insurrection in Chiapas, Mexico caused additional deflation of the peso. In December of that year, the Mexican economy plunged when Mexican investors removed \$11 billion dollars from Mexican banks in just a few days.

While the Mexican economy was faltering in the mid-1990s, the U.S. economy was experiencing a period of rapid expansion. The resulting low unemployment in the United States was a factor in enticing a larger number of Mexican laborers to migrate north in order to flee the deplorable economic conditions in Mexico. However, in this new era of numerical limits, most were crossing the border without documentation.

Scholars debate the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. For example, in the 1970s, scholars' estimations of undocumented immigrants ranged from 600,000 to 6,000,000 undocumented immigrants. Whatever the actual number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States, the issue of undocumented immigration became a political hot button beginning in the 1970s. In 1986, Congress hoped to gain control over illegal immigration by passing the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA had four major points. First, significant new appropriations were made for the United States Border Patrol. Second, penalties were enacted against employers who willfully hired undocumented immigrants. Third, long-term undocumented immigrants were granted amnesty. Fourth, many undocumented agricultural workers were legalized.

IRCA did not end illegal immigration; rather, it drastically changed the pattern of Mexican immigration to the United States. With additional funding from IRCA, the U.S. Border Patrol increased the number of border guards and patrols in an attempt to close the border to undocumented workers. These new efforts, commonly known as Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper, forced undocumented immigrants to cross the border through arid deserts to evade detection. Operation Hold the Line has had two major effects. First, the number of immigrants who die each year while trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border through the desert has increased. Second, successful undocumented immigrants tend to stay within the U.S. for longer periods of time rather than risking apprehension by migrating back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico.

With the failure of IRCA to stem the tide of undocumented immigration, voters in California attempted to end illegal immigration by passing Proposition 187 in 1994. Proposition 187 was designed to deny undocumented immigrants and their children access to public services and public education. Although the voters of California passed Proposition 187, most of its provisions were later found to be unconstitutional by the 9th District Court. The new era of Mexican immigration to the United States begun by the Immigration Act of 1965 is still unfolding and the primary sources for this period are still being drafted, painted, published, and sung. You too are witnesses of and participants in this era of Mexican immigration to the United States.

Vocabulary Words

Immigration Act of 1965

Immigration Reform and Control Act

Operation Hold the Line

peso devaluation

Proposition 187

undocumented immigration



Photo by James R. Tourtellotte, U.S. Customs

A Customs Inspector at the Nogales, Arizona border crossing interviews an individual as he enters the United States from Mexico.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Mexican Immigration to the United States

Group _____ Time Period _____

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1900–1941

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED
1900	237
1901	347
1902	709
1903	528
1904	1,009
1905	2,637
1906	1,997
1907	1,406
1908	6,067
1909	16,251
1910	18,691
1911	19,889
1912	23,238
1913	11,926
1914	14,614
1915	12,340
1916	18,425
1917	17,869
1918	18,524
1919	29,818
1920	52,361
1921	30,758
1922	19,551
1923	63,768
1924	89,336
1925	32,964
1926	43,316
1927	67,721
1928	59,016
1929	40,154
1930	12,703
1931	3,333
1932	2,171
1933	1,936
1934	1,801
1935	1,560
1936	1,716
1937	2,347
1938	2,502
1939	2,640
1940	2,313
1941	2,824

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1942–1965

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED
1942	2,378
1943	4,172
1944	6,598
1945	6,702
1946	7,146
1947	7,558
1948	8,384
1949	8,083
1950	6,744
1951	6,153
1952	9,079
1953	17,183
1954	30,645
1955	43,702
1956	61,320
1957	49,321
1958	26,791
1959	22,909
1960	32,708
1961	41,476
1962	55,805
1963	55,986
1964	34,448
1965	40,686

Number of Mexican Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1966–1999

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED
1966	47,217
1967	43,034
1968	44,716
1969	45,748
1970	44,821
1971	10,105
1972	64,040
1973	70,141
1974	71,586
1975	62,205
1976	57,863
1977	44,079
1978	92,367
1979	52,096
1980	56,680
1981	101,268
1982	56,106
1983	59,079
1984	57,557
1985	61,077
1986	66,533
1987	72,351
1988	95,039
1989	405,172
1990	679,068
1991	946,167
1992	213,802
1993	126,561
1994	111,398
1995	89,932
1996	163,572
1997	146,865
1998	131,575
1999	147,573

**Number of Braceros Admitted Annually,
1942–1965**

YEAR	BRACEROS ADMITTED
1942	4,203
1943	52,098
1944	62,170
1945	49,454
1946	32,043
1947	19,632
1948	35,345
1949	107,000
1950	67,500
1951	192,000
1952	197,100
1953	201,380
1954	309,033
1955	398,650
1956	445,197
1957	436,049
1958	432,857
1959	437,643
1960	315,846
1961	291,420
1962	194,978
1963	186,865
1964	177,736
1965	20,286

Number of Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol

Note: These figures reflect the total number of apprehensions of all nationalities. However, Mexicans have consistently formed the majority of apprehensions.

Year	Number of Apprehensions
1924	4,614
1925	2,961
1926	4,047
1927	4,495
1928	5,529
1929	8,538
1930	18,319
1931	8,409
1932	7,116
1933	15,875
1934	8,910
1935	9,139
1936	9,534
1937	9,535
1938	8,684
1939	9,376
1940	8,051
1941	6,082
1942	n.a.
1943	8,189
1944	26,689
1945	63,602
1946	91,456
1947	182,986
1948	179,385
1949	278,538
1950	485,215
1951	500,000
1952	543,538
1953	865,318
1954	1,075,168
1955	242,608
1956	72,442
1957	44,451
1958	37,242
1959	30,196
1960	29,651
1961	29,817
1962	30,272
1963	39,124

1964	43,844
1965	55,340
1966	89,751
1967	108,327
1968	151,705
1969	201,636
1970	277,377
1971	348,178
1972	430,213
1973	576,823
1974	709,959
1975	680,392
1976	781,474
1977	954,778
1978	1,057,977
1979	1,076,418
1980	910,361
1981	975,780
1982	970,246
1983	1,251,357
1984	1,246,981
1985	1,348,749
1986	1,767,400
1987	1,190,488
1988	1,008,145
1989	954,243
1990	1,169,939
1991	1,197,875
1992	1,258,481
1993	1,327,261
1994	1,094,719
1995	1,394,554
1996	1,649,986
1997	1,536,520
1998	1,679,439
1999	1,714,035

To purchase the complete unit, see the
National Center for History in the Schools catalog:

<http://nchs.ucla.edu/catalog.html>

<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-

Questions?

National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA

Marian McKenna Olivas, Coordinator

Gary B. Nash, Director

6265 Bunche Hall

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1473

(310) 825-4702

FAX: (310) 267-2103

<http://nchs.ucla.edu>

<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-<>-0-

To purchase and download a complete ebook (pdf) version of this unit,
go to Social Studies Services: <http://www.socialstudies.com>
(Use the "ebooks" link on the left side & search for the title)