

IMMIGRATION

LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

M. Karen Bracken
Tulane University

SUGGESTED TIME: 1 classroom period

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Copier, slide projector, VCR if desired

APPLICABILITY: U.S. History, World History, World
Geography, Civics, Current Events

OBJECTIVE: Students will develop a basic
understanding of the reasons for internal
and international migration and the issues
surrounding the immigration of Latin
Americans to the United States.

LEVEL: HIGH SCHOOL

Source: *Latin America—Land of
Diversity*. Roger Thayer Stone
Center for Latin American Studies,
Tulane University (New Orleans)
and The Tinker Foundation, Inc.

KEY CONCEPTS/VOCABULARY

- Emigrants:** People who leave a region or country to live in another.
- Hispanics:** People having cultural origins or descent from Spain or Spanish-American countries.
- Hyper-Urbanization:** Urbanization that occurs so rapidly or in such proportions that the area cannot easily accommodate all of the new arrivals with houses, employment, and social services.
- Informal Economy:** The part of the economy which is not regulated by the government. People who work in the informal economy do not have work permits and do not pay taxes, nor are they protected by government labor laws.
- Internal Migration:** Moving within the boundaries of a single country. In Latin America, this usually means a change from rural areas to urban areas.
- International Migration:** Population movement between different countries.
- Numerical Quota System:** A part of the U.S. immigration law which places a limit on the number of immigrants who will be accepted from a particular country or region during a specific time period.
- Out-Migration:** Departure from a region or country; emigration.
- Pull Factors:** Factors which attract people to move to an area.
- Push Factors:** Factors which cause a person to leave or want to leave an area to live elsewhere.
- Squatter Settlements:** Areas of unregulated housing and settlement. Often squatters simply move onto land which appears to be unoccupied and make their homes there.

Stepped
Migration:

A series of moves from areas of lower population concentration to areas of higher population concentration. For example, an individual might move from the countryside to a town, then to a small city, and finally to the large capital city.

Underemployment: Being employed in a position which does not provide enough income for basic needs, nor take full advantage of a person's abilities.

LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Wherever you live in the United States, you probably have some newcomers from Latin America or the Caribbean in your city or home town. You may live in a community with individuals whose Spanish-speaking ancestors settled in long before the Pilgrims sailed to Massachusetts. Certainly not all of the Hispanics living in this country are new arrivals! However, in the last three decades (the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s), the United States has experienced a large increase in the number of people coming from Latin America and the Caribbean to live or work here. The increase is so large and so noticeable that it has been labeled "the New Immigration."

Out-migration from the Latin American and Caribbean countries has reached very great proportions. While many people have gone to Western Europe or Canada, the main destination of the Latin American and Caribbean emigrants has been the United States. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. today, a result of both natural increase (high birth rates) and immigration.

Virtually every Latin American country has added citizens to the immigration stream. Mexico, as our closest neighbor and the previous owner of a large part of the U.S. national territory, has by far the largest representation within the Latin American population residing in the U.S. Some social scientists and government officials estimate that 60% of the Hispanic population here is Mexican or of Mexican descent. Individuals from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Nicaragua and El Salvador probably make up the next largest groups of Latin American emigrants, but there is no way to be certain about exact numbers. (See Graphs 1 & 2)

Why is that? While most Latin Americans immigrate to this country with the permission of the U.S. government, many do not have permission from the government and are therefore considered "undocumented" or "illegal" residents. Therefore, even when we use the numbers provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service or by the U.S. Census, we can not be sure that we have counted all of the newcomers to this country. Social and political movements in the U.S. which sought to control and reduce immigration resulted in new legislation in 1986. While the new law provides an amnesty clause for many people already living in the U.S. without documentation, it also attempts to tighten control on the numbers of the "New Immigration." No one is certain what the outcome of the new law will be, but at present most people would agree that the actual number of

Latin American immigrants is considerably higher than the official counts.

Before "the New Immigration," many of the Latin American immigrants were rural people who worked in agriculture and took jobs in the American countryside. This is no longer the case. Today, Latin Americans live mainly in the urban areas and hold a variety of non-agricultural jobs. Many are educated, skilled workers, even professionals who practice law, medicine or engineering. The new Latin American immigrants are part of a complex population which cannot be easily or simply categorized. They come from many different nations, have many different backgrounds, and also have many different reasons for leaving their home countries. Some migrate for economic reasons; they want a better job, better pay or just the opportunity to use specially acquired skills. Others leave because they desire education or special training. Still others are forced to leave for political reasons; they do not agree with the national government in power, they are persecuted by their own government, or they wish for a more stable, less changeable political environment.

The distinction between becoming a migrant for political reasons as opposed to economic reasons has become very important because this difference often has a powerful effect on a person's legal status. People who migrate for political reasons are considered to be refugees and may enter this country even if there are already more people from their country than would normally be allowed under the U.S.'s numerical quota system. They may also receive other special considerations. This is particularly true if a person can prove that he or she is being persecuted by the government of the home country or that his or her life is in danger for political reasons. The desire for better economic opportunity is not considered as important a reason for migration. People who want to enter the U.S. for this reason must either enter within the quota system or prove that they have special circumstances, such as being able to fill a specific job needed in the U.S. or having relatives who are already citizens or residents. This can be a very long, sometimes expensive process, and the applicant may still be denied admittance.

However, not everyone agrees with the Federal government's definition of who should be considered a political refugee and allowed to enter the U.S. more easily. This has led to protest and friction. One example is the Sanctuary Movement. In this movement, people in the U.S. help people from other countries, especially Latin American countries, who claim to be political refugees but are denied refugee status by the U.S. government. Members of the

Sanctuary Movement, whose motivations may be either political or religious, help the emigrants to enter the U.S. illegally, and may even hide them from law enforcement officials. Part of the problem is that while it is occasionally easy to decide whether a person's reasons for wanting to enter the U.S. are political or economic, very often the truth is a combination of both.

Another way of talking about immigration is to look for the push factors or the pull factors involved. Push factors mean a difficult situation or lack of opportunity at home -- for example, no job, no land to farm, low pay, no chance for higher education or fear of the government. Pull factors imply that there are attractions elsewhere such as freedom from persecution, better employment, or educational opportunities. Again, in some cases the pressure of push factors may be very obvious, while in others the pull factors seem to be most important. However, in many cases immigration is the result of a combination of both push and pull factors.

In order to understand some of the specific reasons why Latin Americans immigrate, we need to look closely at the dynamics of their home countries. When we do this, the first thing that becomes obvious is that while international migration (moving out of one's country) is a current trend, so is increased internal migration (changing location within one's country). Internal migration is commonplace in the United States. While people in many countries are likely to live their entire lives in the same community, the average American moves several times in his or her lifetime, often to a better job, a bigger house, a different school or a better environment. This movement occurs in Latin America, too, but some of the trends are different.

Much of the internal migration in Latin America is rural to urban migration, that is when people move from the countryside or a small town into the cities. Sometimes they move directly to a large city, usually the capital city. Other times they move more gradually, from a farm to a town, then to a small city, then a larger one and eventually even to the capital. Moving this way is called stepped migration.

Individuals, families or groups feel pushed out of the rural areas or small towns by the lack of opportunity confronting them. They may have no land, not enough land to provide their food, limited employment, or scarce educational and medical facilities. They move seeking a better quality of life. They may keep moving as long as they believe that improvement exists somewhere else. Of course, no one likes to leave behind relatives, friends,

familiar places and customs. Migration is often a painful decision. But if conditions are bad enough (push factors) or the promise of improvement great enough (pull factors), migration is often the end result.

The problem is that so many people are forced into this decision that the urban areas of Latin American countries are becoming or have become overpopulated. The same factors that make the Hispanic population the fastest growing one in the U.S., namely high natural increase and high levels of immigration, mean that many Latin American cities are experiencing hyperurbanization. They can not provide a decent quality of life for all of the people living in them. There are shortages of housing, basic services and employment. Once having made the move, the migrants do the best they can to fulfill their own basic necessities.

The movement of so many people to the cities of Latin America has resulted in two patterns; squatter settlements and a large informal economy. When new arrivals find that there is no available housing which they can afford, they will first try to stay with a relative or a friend. If that is impossible or they simply wish for a place of their own, the solution has become to find any available spot of land and start building on it. It may be public land like a park or the land around a freeway entrance, or it may be private land that is not being used by the owner.

The building that is put up will probably be a very poor one, something small and simple and not very expensive. It may be constructed of cardboard or sheets of metal or any material the migrant can find to use. Because the land is not in a regular residential area, there will not be any services like electricity or piped water. There may not even be a road near the house. Living like this can be uncomfortable, unsanitary and even unsafe. In addition, the migrants must live with the fear that the government, the owner, or a prospective buyer will kick them off the land. Still, for a while at least, they have some place to call "home." If there is any space available at the spot which has been settled and built upon, the migrant or the migrant family will rapidly be joined by neighbors, other people faced by the same predicament. Soon there will be a cluster of dwellings on the spot. It may be a garbage dump or the side of a steep hill or the bottom of a ravine but it will become populated. Often when you see photographs of Latin American cities, you will find evidence of these squatter communities. They may even overwhelm the landscape. They are a permanent feature of the urban picture in Latin American countries.

Over time, the inhabitants of squatter settlements are often able to improve their home and their community. They may be able to afford bricks for the house and glass for the windows. They may be able to convince the government to provide the area with water and sewerage lines. They may join together to build a road into the community or to construct a schoolhouse. Many of the settlements change over time into fairly decent places to live because of the increased stability of their residents. Sadly, this transformation is not possible for everyone and many of the squatter settlements remain terrible places to live. It is said that they form "belts of misery" around the Latin American cities.

Another serious problem which faces most of the rural to urban immigrants is the lack of jobs in the urban economy. Thousands come to escape unemployment or underemployment in the rural areas, only to find that there are not enough jobs in the city or that they do not have the skills to find a good job. However, the migrant population as well as the rest of the urban poor have discovered a practical solution to the employment problem. They quickly find their way into the informal economy.

The informal economy is made up of all of the jobs outside of government regulation. This means jobs held by people who work without permits, without being in the income tax or social security systems, and without the protection of labor laws and codes. If you travel to almost any city in Latin America, the informal workers should be immediately visible to you. Many of the streets are filled with people selling food, clothing or trinkets from carts or small stands. Others are shining shoes or hawking newspapers at the corners, collecting bottles and paper to recycle for cash or even washing the windshields of cars caught in traffic. Other informal workers may not be as visible to the casual observer. Women who work in private homes as maids and cooks or men who do a day's labor on a construction site for cash instead of a paycheck, as well as many others, are part of the large and essentially underground economies that are so common in Latin American urban societies today. Some scholars believe that they form the backbone of the urban economies; others believe that these workers are marginal to the economy.

Everyone would agree, however, that the presence of so many newcomers willing to accept almost any work for even very little pay makes the competition great for those on the job market. It is not unreasonable to believe that competition may be so strong that it forces people to consider international immigration if their dreams can not be realized even in the capital city. This type of economic

competition confronts not only the rural and urban poor. The troubled economies, population pressures and lack of job opportunities in Latin America affect even the middle class, the skilled and the educated. They too have joined the exodus behind the "New Immigration". Many feel that the lowered quality of urban life caused by hyperurbanization is no longer tolerable and they seek their fortunes elsewhere. In the U.S., the middle class generally moves to the suburbs; the Latin American middle class often emigrates.

This results in the complex composition of the Latin American immigrant population in the U.S. today. People from different national backgrounds, from different social classes, and from rural, newly urban or urban origins have all found their way to this country. Their presence has been augmented by other Latin Americans fleeing political chaos or civil disruptions occurring in several of the countries, so that it is now not uncommon to hear Spanish spoken on many streets and in many neighborhoods in the U.S. The Latin Americans are part of the latest chapter in our long and fascinating immigration history. They are yet another group which changes the composition and adds to the culture of this nation of immigrants.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

10 slides and descriptions.

2 graphs describing the Hispanic population of the United States.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Nearly everyone now living in the United States has "roots" in another part of the world. What do you know about your own family history? Did your ancestors come to the U.S. for economic reasons? Political reasons? A combination? Did they come voluntarily or were they brought by force? What do you think would have happened to them if they had stayed in their home country? How would your life be different? If you don't know your family's history or origins, why not? What factors caused your family to lose track of its origins?

2. Many U.S. citizens resent the arrival of new immigrants, saying they take jobs while citizens are unemployed. Others say that immigrants are vital to the economy because they perform work that people already here either cannot or will not do. What is your opinion about this issue?

3. The U.S. government often denies refugee status to people coming from nations the U.S. considers democratic, even though these people feel that they are being persecuted by the "democratic" government and that their lives are in danger. What do you think should be the definition of a political refugee? If American citizens help someone to enter the country illegally because they feel the immigrant should not have been denied refugee status, should they be prosecuted?

4. Some people think that an "economic refugee" status should be created for people coming from countries or areas which are very poor. Others say that economic needs are not a good reason for giving some people special privileges. What is your opinion? Can you give arguments for both sides?

5. What does "informal economy" mean? Is there an informal economy in the U.S.?

6. The U.S. has always been a nation of immigrants. Can you name several groups which have immigrated in large numbers in the past? What were their reasons for immigrating? What contributions did they make to U.S.

culture? What difficulties did they face? How is the "New Immigration" of Latin Americans similar or different?

ACTIVITIES

1. Have students read the subject overview and review key concepts/vocabulary as homework the night before class. In class, review the article with the students, utilizing the slides and discussion topics included in the packet. Once reviewed, administer the recommended quiz.
2. Students should interview their relatives to find out as much as possible about their own family history, particularly their ancestors' reasons for emigrating to the U.S. If older relatives do not know why their ancestors came or were brought to the U.S., the student should try to figure approximately when their ancestors arrived, research the history of the country of origin at the time, and speculate on possible reasons.
3. Once the above research is completed, have students write an imaginary diary depicting one particular ancestor's decision, voyage, and first reactions to the U.S. Was the trip a voluntary adventure, a desperate escape, a forced exile? Was the trip boring or interesting or dangerous? Was life better or worse in the U.S.?
4. Ask students to contact organizations in your community which offer services and assistance to immigrants (even non-Hispanics). Students should contact at least one of these agencies or clubs regarding the difficulties and adjustments that characterize immigrant life in the United States. Have students write an essay concerning the information they acquired. These same organizations may be willing to send a visitor to class to talk about these issues or their personal experiences.
5. Have students interview a recent immigrant to the United States. Why did they come? What were the push and pull factors? What was their vision of the U.S. before they arrived? How did that vision change? How do they feel about the nation they left behind?
6. Many classrooms today include Hispanic students, descendants of immigrants or of original Hispanic settlers of the U.S. Ask them to discuss or write about their experience as they react to two distinct cultures.
7. Ask students to do a survey of restaurants in their town, neighborhood or city, using the telephone directory or any other listing of restaurants. (Students may wish to

contact someone at the restaurant to find out whether it is an "authentic" ethnic restaurant or a chain-type establishment.) How do these restaurants reflect the "New Immigration" discussed in the subject overview? Students could also do a survey of cultural associations or clubs.

8. Have students view the film "El Norte." (See citation under Supplemental Audio-Visual Materials) What factors influence the characters to emigrate? What are the push and pull factors? Should they be considered political refugees? Why? What must they do to enter the U.S.? What difficulties must they face? What is their vision of the United States - El Norte? What problems do they have once they are in the U.S.? How do different people treat them? Why? At the end of the movie what happens to their dream of El Norte?

RECOMMENDED QUIZ

1. From what country has the largest number of Hispanic immigrants to the United States come?

2. What was the major goal of the new immigration legislation of 1986?

3. Why are we unsure of the numbers of new immigrants in this country?

4. Do members of the Sanctuary Movement work for the U.S. government?

5. What are two of the push factors mentioned by the author?

6. What are two types of shortages which occur when a city suffers from hyperurbanization?

7. What is stepped migration?

8. What distinguishes a squatter settlement from other kinds of new settlements?

9. What is the main difference between a job in the informal economy and one which is part of the formal economic structure?

10. What does the author mean when she says that the Latin American population in this country is very diverse?

RECOMMENDED QUIZ: TEACHER'S KEY

1. Mexico.
2. To control the amount of immigration to the United States.
3. Because some are here without documentation, making them difficult to count.
4. No. They are in conflict with the government over its denial of refugee status to certain national groups.
5. No jobs, no land to farm, low pay, lack of educational and/or healthcare facilities, fear of the government.
6. There are shortages of housing, basic services, and employment.
7. An individual moves several times, usually from smaller to increasingly larger population areas.
8. Squatters do not own or rent the land; they settle on public land or private land which is not being used by the owner. Also, these neighborhoods do not have public services, at least not for the first several years.
9. The work performed in the informal economy is outside of government regulation and protection.
10. Some Hispanics are recent immigrants to the U.S., while others belong to families which have been here for decades, even centuries. Immigrants come from different countries and different backgrounds; they come for different reasons and are sometimes treated differently by our government. (Student answers will vary.)

ADDITIONAL READING LIST

- Gann, L.H. and Peter J. Duigan. The Hispanics in the United States: A History. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986.
- de Jesus, Carolina Maria. Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962.
- McWilliams, Carey. North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968.
- Miller, Tom. On the Border: Portraits of America's Southwest Frontier. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
- Rivera, Edward. Family Installments: Memories of Growing Up Hispanic. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1982.

SUPPLEMENTAL AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS

Favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Shows life in the favelas, notes how favela-dwellers are victims of unfounded prejudices, and shows that they are actually people determined to improve their lot in life. Available for purchase. 28 slides, guide. Latin American Curriculum Resource Center, Tulane University.

One River, One Country. Bill Moyers report on the U.S.-Mexican border. It explores the situation at the border, where the border is not a barrier but a place where the Mexican and North American cultures, economies, communities, and destinies are merging. Video. 55 mins. PBS Video.

El Norte. The story of two young Guatemalans who flee political unrest in their homeland, dreaming of a utopian life in the U.S. Danger follows them constantly as they join many who illegally enter the United States and finally they face the frustration of the life of migrant workers. 1984. In Spanish with English subtitles. Video. 114 mins. Available in most video rental stores nationwide.

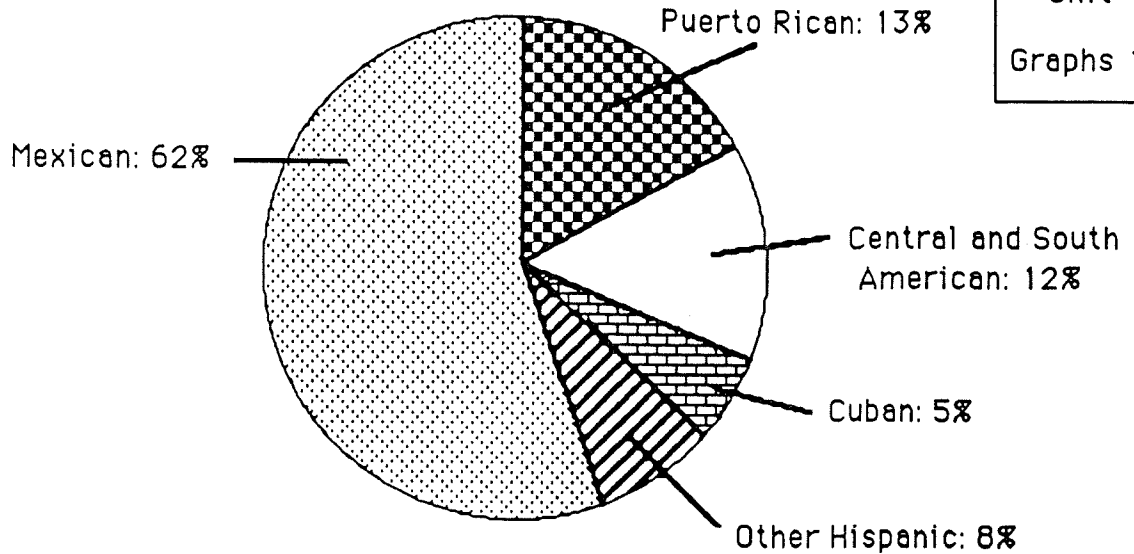
El Otro Lado. Film made with the rare cooperation of large groups of Mexican campesinos as they walk into the U.S. to live as undocumented workers in citrus groves near Phoenix, Arizona. 1978. Spanish with English subtitles. Video. 60 mins. Facets Multimedia.

Stand and Deliver. A Hispanic math and computer teacher goes to California in the early 1980s to teach in the public schools, but finds the Chicano students have no interest in learning. Through his concern and dedication these students who were underachievers come to excel in school and life. Video. 120 mins. Available in most video rental stores nationwide.

Origin of Hispanics Living in the United States

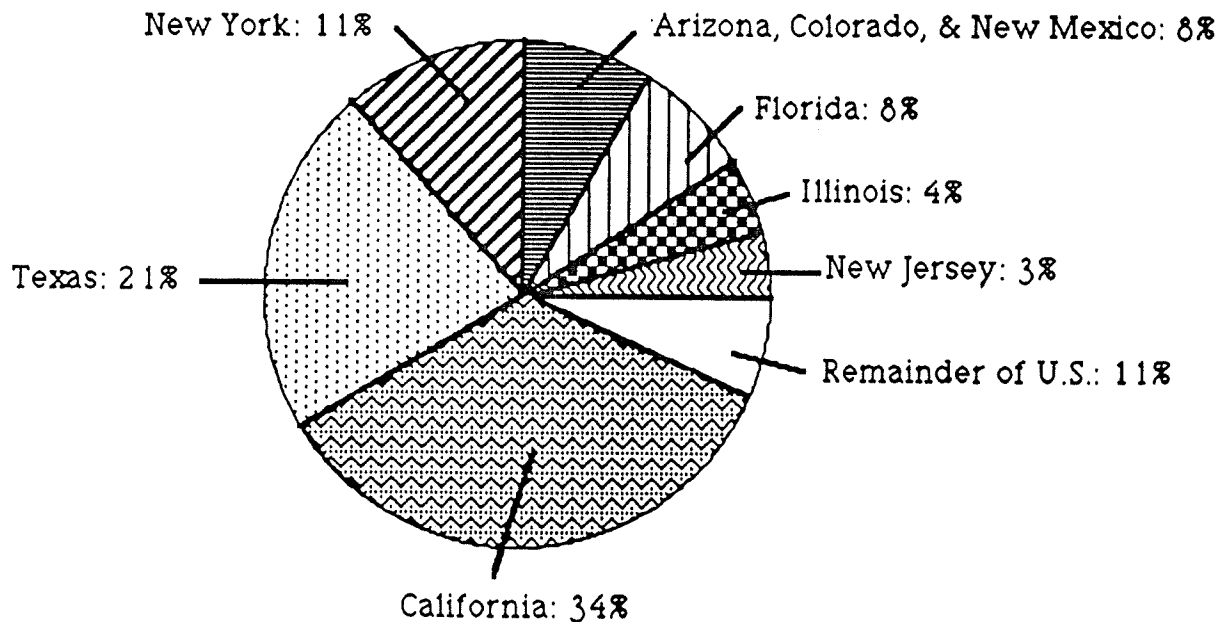
Of the 19.4 million Hispanics living in the United States in 1988, their origins were:

Unit 16
Graphs 1 & 2



Source: U.S. Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 159, Population Profile of the United States: 1989, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1989.

Geographic Distribution of the Hispanic Population in the U.S.: 1988



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 438
The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1988, U.S. Government Printing Office,
Washington, D.C. 1989

Courtesy of:
Lisa J. Barczak of Tulane University

LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

UNIT #16

A GUIDE TO ACCOMPANYING SLIDES

1. House in rural Peru. Many people decide to leave their homes in Latin America and resettle in other parts of the world. Often their destination is the United States. (Courtesy of David Dressing).
2. People and their open air shelter (house/tailor shop). Latin Americans choose to leave their countries for both political and social reasons. Often they are victims of political persecution and must flee to save their lives. Others, like these people, live in extreme poverty with little or no hope of finding employment, so they may migrate to find better opportunities. (Courtesy of Judith Hancock Sandoval, Latin American Library, Photographic Archive, Tulane University).
3. People carrying bundles and water gourds. When they decide to go elsewhere, people may pack up and try to take their belongings with them, or they may take no more than the clothes they wear. (Courtesy of Abraham Guillen, Latin American Library, Photographic Archive, Tulane University).
4. River and banks. When crossing into the U.S., some Latin Americans arrive on foot and may have to cross the Rio Grande. Others may arrive by plane or boat. (Courtesy of Lisa J. Barczak).
5. Farmer at a fruit stand in the marketplace. Those who come to the U.S. may have been farmers who tended fruit, vegetables or livestock. Additionally, some immigrants may find work on farms as migrant (or seasonal) laborers in the United States. (Courtesy of Ronit Weingarden).
6. Four professional men. Other Latin Americans who come to the U.S. are professionals--doctors, lawyers, journalists, etc. (Courtesy of Andrea Brouillette).
7. Latin American Apostolate, New Orleans, Louisiana. Organizations like the Latin American Apostolate help recent immigrants. They provide many services: they inform them of the laws, regulations and restrictions pertaining to immigrants; they teach them English; they help immigrants find legal

SLIDES ARE IN THE
FULL CURRICULUM (A
LARGE GREEN BINDER),
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and The Tinker Foundation, Inc.

representation; they help them find jobs; and they help them find housing. (Courtesy of Lisa J. Barczak).

8. Mexican restaurant in New Orleans, Louisiana. When immigrants get the proper papers to work and open a business, they are often rather successful. A common example are restaurants. Many Latin Americans open restaurants featuring the cuisines of their native countries, particularly Mexican and Cuban, which are increasingly popular in the U.S. (Courtesy of J. Lisa Barczak).
9. Rural Peruvian corn field and cows. In addition to immigration from Latin America to foreign countries, there is internal migration. Internal migration denotes migration from one place to another within a country. For instance, people living in rural Peru, in the mountains, may decide to move to Lima to find work. (Courtesy of David Dressing).
10. Asuncion, Paraguay. Sometimes people go to the cities for the same reason they would go to the U.S.: they are searching for a job which pays a decent wage. However, often they do not find a job and are forced to live in poor housing on the fringes of the city. (Courtesy of Eric Nathanson).