

BORDER

Prepared by Lauren Dasse, University of Arizona Latin American Studies student, for a "Human Rights" presentation on Issues Day 2002 at Greenfields Country Day School in Tucson.

Level: High School

Topics/Concepts: Mexican-U.S. border relationships, women in Latin America, maquiladoras, economics, migration

BORDER ISSUES

Contents

This lesson/presentation on border issues consists of the following materials :

- 3-page outline
- 1-page bibliography of web resources
- 3 overheads with map, photos and statistics
- 1 overhead of web resources

Purpose: To provide a general overview of some of the issues facing people in the U.S.-Mexican border zone, including:

- Very brief border history, focusing on economics
- Maquiladoras, women workers and their rights, wages, living conditions.
- Migration, including reasons for migration, dangerous crossings, Border Patrol
- Initiatives to address border issues
- What you can do

Outline—Border Issues

- I. Introductory comments
 - A. Ask group if they have ever traveled to Nogales, and if so, their comments about Nogales (poverty, etc.)
 - B. Observations regarding population size in Nogales, AZ and Nogales, Sonora—estimated that Nogales, AZ has 40,000 inhabitants while Nogales, Sonora has 400,000 inhabitants (numbers are open to discussion, taken from a BorderLinks talk, and constant flow of migrants in Nogales, Sonora makes it difficult to decipher exact number of permanent residents)
- II. Border History (brief)
 - A. Free Trade Zone first established in 1965
 - B. NAFTA—1994—encouraged US companies to move assembly plants to border cities in Mexico and take advantage of lower wages, environmental codes that are less strict than those in the US
 - C. Results: increased level in migration to border cities from other parts of Mexico in search of jobs in maquiladoras, increased levels of poverty, crime, pollution (from the factories), environmental degradation
(source: www.borderlinks.org)
- III. Maquiladoras
 - A. Maquilas, maquiladoras—name of large assembly plants in Mexico, majority of maquiladoras are owned by US companies
 - B. Employ Mexican labor—majority of maquiladora workers are young, single females originally from other parts of Mexico.
 - C. Human rights abuses
 - i. Women are subject to sexual harassment from supervisors, are afraid to speak up because they fear losing their jobs
 - ii. Can be subject to pregnancy tests before they are hired, can be fired if they become pregnant
 - iii. Can work in unsafe conditions, such as with chemicals but without protective facemasks, gloves, etc.
 - D. Wages
 - A. Average maquiladora worker makes between 6 and 7 US dollars a day, however pay rate varies for each maquiladora
 - B. Workers are not able to adequately provide for their families with low wages received, not a living wage, especially because the cost of living is high along the border
 - C. 2001 study conducted in 15 border cities found that maquila workers typically do not earn enough to meet their family's basic needs, and it would take 4 to 5 maquila salaries combined to meet essential needs of

a family of 4 (source: Borderlines vol. 9 no. 8, "Border Briefs," September 2001, www.us-mex.org/borderlines.html)

- D. Poor living conditions—due to low wages and a high cost of living along the border
 - i. Many families live in "squatter settlements" or "colonias"—communities invade land and set up colonias, build housing from straw mats, eventually constructing homes of concrete, etc. and by working together, they obtain basic services such as water and electricity (after many years)
 - ii. Families must make payments on the land—land is very expensive to buy, and they have five years to pay off land

IV. Migration Issues

- A. Poverty in other parts of Mexico can drive people to migrate to border towns in search of jobs in maquiladoras, or else migrants can try to cross the border and work in the US
- B. Dangerous crossing conditions
 - i. The border region consists of a cruel desert, with unbearably hot temperatures in the summer and freezing temperatures during winter nights
 - ii. Deaths caused by dehydration and vigilante activity by farmers along the US side of the border
 - iii. Between 1998 and 2000, according to INS figures, migrant deaths on the border increased by 41%
 - iv. Nearly 500 Mexican nationals died from various causes while attempting to cross the border in 2000

(source: Borderlines, www.us-mex.org and www.ins.gov)

C. US Border Patrol

- "Militarization" of the border—number of BP agents increased—nearly doubled between 1993 and 1997 from 3,400 to more than 6,000 agents and is mandated by law to double in 2002
- ii. Border Patrol hired 1,708 new agents in 2000, bringing total number of agents to 9,212 (in 2001)
- iii. Over past two years, INS and Border Patrol have elicited the highest number of complaints of all US law enforcement agencies regarding violations of human rights
- iv. Accusations of human rights violations include illegal searches, racist or sexist remarks, inappropriate firearm threats, denial of requests for food and water after arrests, denial of due process, sexual misconduct, beatings, shootings, detainees housed in jails with convicted criminals, not in INS facilities

(source: Borderlines, vol. 9 no. 3, March 2001, www.us-mex.org/borderlines.html)

V. Future of Border Issues

- A. President Bush and President Fox talked of a new guest worker program that would facilitate migrants' entry into the US to work; however talks have been postponed after terrorist events of September 11th
- B. Efforts to revise process of legalization of immigrants
- C. Improve laws in regards to NAFTA—for example, make maquiladoras contribute to local community, etc.
- D. What you can do to help
 - i. Volunteer within your own community—with an agency that helps marginalized communities
 - ii. Educate yourself about the issues—learn more. With education comes understanding.
 - iii. Contact organizations listed on "Sources of Information on the Web—Border Issues"

Sources of Information on the Web Border Issues

Tucson sources:

Center for Latin American Studies, University of Arizona—<http://las.arizona.edu>

BorderLinks—www.borderlinks.org

Humane Borders—www.humaneborders.org

American Friends Service Committee—Arizona Border Rights Project—www.afsc.org/az/derechos.htm

National/International sources:

BIOS—Border Information and Outreach Service—www.us-mex.org

Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network--www.igc.org/mhssn

Sweatgear—www.blank.org/sweatgear

Resource Center of the Americas—www.americas.org

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
(NNIRR)
www.nnirr.org

Immigration and Naturalization Service (links to Border Patrol website)—www.ins.gov

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Nogales—105 maquilas, 36, 705 workers employed
 Tijuana—737 maquilas, 162,676 workers employed
 Ciudad Juárez—289 maquilas, 216,696 workers employed
 Matamoros—137 maquilas, 62,565 workers employed
Source: Twin Plant News, November 1999

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