

The second industrialization era of America, also known as the *Gilded Age* is one of the most significant time periods in American history. From the Bessemer process, refining of oil, and the proliferation of steel production the United States experienced a rapid industrial change. The United States aggressively made efforts to “close the western frontier” through Indian wars that would led to the Dawes Act, the Transcontinental Railroad, Homestead Act, and the mining of minerals and metals.

In the backdrop of the *Gilded Age*, the United States looked beyond its borders for territorial and economic gains. As a result of the Spanish American War in 1898, the United States acquired the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico as well as economic control and oversight of Cuba due to the Platt Amendment. The United States also annexed Hawaii and began trade with China. Trade and strong economic ties with Mexico also became lucrative. El Paso, Texas became the gateway to bridge the two nations.

Copper and lead-silver traveled to El Paso from mines throughout Mexico. Rail lines connected mines to major railways such as the Mexican National Railroad, the Santa Fe, and Southern Pacific. El Paso became central to processing the minerals that crossed borders. In 1887, a smelter was established in El Paso which would become known as ASARCO. The purpose of our Unit is to understand and contextualize the global, national, border, and regional impact of industry during the *Gilded Age*.

As a team, we crafted different activities within our unit to demonstrate the complexities the ASARCO plant presented on the border. Furthermore, we incorporated visuals and other activities to bridge any shortcomings our English language learners may experience. We also utilized the vast resources the UTEP oral history page possesses. The purpose of the oral history activity was to provide different experiences amongst workers and families of Asarco workers. Furthermore, it sheds light on the bigger experiences of industrial workers at the turn of the century and how race, class, gender, and religion all provided contradictions and nuances throughout the industrialized world.

The US-Mexico border is a contentious, militarized, and problematic symbol of injustice. The NEH program provided voices for the voiceless and highlighted concepts of memory, narratives, and the rich culture that both sides of the border share. The Chihuahuan Desert has evolved over time from the harsh temperatures, shear wind, and the human influences on its landscape. The one thing that will remain will be the memories of the individuals who inhabited the desert only if we continue to study how and why people are affected from the border.

-Francesca Alonso and Joseph Leff