



Border Patrol agents wait for border crossers to reach their position. Photo: Loomis Dean/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Unit Plan: Change and Continuity: Policing the Borderlands

Prepared by Becky Villagrán, a history teacher from Berkeley High School in Berkeley, California. She teaches twentieth-century IB History and Chicana/Latina history. She was an amateur boxer for many years, but has retired from competition; however, she still loves training and sparring to help out her teammates before their fights. Becky has been teaching history for seven years now, and she loves changing the curriculum to expand her own knowledge of history. Becky revived a Chicano history course to Berkeley High after a twenty-year gap. She is excited to be part of the Summer Institute to expand her knowledge of the history of the Southwest borderlands and to guide her students to understand the complex histories of identity and colonization that have created the crises of the current day.

Subject Area: US History, Chicana/Latina History, Ethnic Studies, Government

Keywords: Mexican-American War, Treaty of Hidalgo, Texas Rangers, Border Patrol, policing, police brutality, white supremacy, internalized racism, racial profiling, borderlands, political cartoons, change and continuity

Grade Levels and Time Required: Best suited for high school students, ideally Juniors and Seniors that are already familiar with historical thinking skill of Change and Continuity

Time Required: About 2-3 weeks.

Instructional Objectives and Student Learning: From the [California State Social Studies standards](#):

8.8 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced. Sec. 6: Describe the Texas War for

Independence and the Mexican-American War, including territorial settlements, the aftermath of the wars, and the effects the wars had on the lives of Americans, including Mexican Americans today.

11.9: Students analyze US Foreign Policy since World War II. Sec 7: Examine relations between the United States and Mexico in the twentieth century, including key economic, political, immigration, and environmental issues.

Goals of the lesson:

1. Students will be able to analyze the change and continuity of US policing of its borders.
2. Students will analyze the role of race in policing the border.
3. Students will be able to analyze political cartoons, learn the techniques of editorial cartoons, and make their own political cartoon critiquing US policy.

Guiding Questions:

1. How has policing the border changed over time? What continuities exist between the 19th century and today?
2. What are the roots of border policing policy?
3. Who belongs on the land? Who makes that determination?
4. How do people resist Texas Rangers? How do people resist the Border Patrol?
5. How do these policing tactics of the border mirror the policing in our community(ies)

Materials and Resources:

Students should complete this mini-unit after learning the history of Westward colonial expansion, Manifest Destiny, Texas War of Independence and the Mexican American War. Students should already be made aware of the Treaty of Hidalgo and the way in which Mexican landowners and citizens were promised the ability to keep their land, and be made US citizens and how those promises were often systematically not honored. A great lesson to use on the Mexican American War is the [Rethinking Schools Mexican American War “Tea Party” activity](#).

Introduction: Students will be introduced to the idea of policing this new border following the Treaty of Hidalgo. This should connect to students’ ideas of the purpose and function of policing in general. Students will likely have strong opinions on the police in their community and they should be encouraged to think about the different vantage points on the positives and negatives of having a police force and what should ultimately be the purpose of police. Students will also be introduced to the techniques and purposes of political or editorial cartoons. They will then demonstrate their views/critique on the policing of the border by creating their own political cartoon with an accompanying “artist’s statement” explaining their process, ideas, and techniques used to display their view.

Unit Plan:

Lesson 1: [The Purpose of Policing](#)

Lesson 2: [The Texas Rangers \(Power point\)](#)

Lesson 3: [Analyzing Primary and Secondary Sources on the Texas Rangers](#)

Lesson 4: [Resistance to the Texas Rangers: Juan Cortina](#)

Lesson 5: [The History of the Border Patrol \(prohibition and immigration\)](#)

Lesson 6: Resistance to Border Patrol: [The story of Carmelita Torres and the Bath Riots of 1917](#)

Lesson 7: [Policing the Border today](#)

Lesson 8: [Resisting Border Patrol today: No More Deaths](#)

Lesson 9: [Racial Profiling in Border Policing- Who gets policed for unlawful entry? What is the role of race in policing the border?](#)

Lesson 10: [Intro to Political Cartoons and Techniques](#)

Lesson 11 [Assessment: Creating your own Political Cartoon](#)

Extend/Elaborate:

In this unit of study, students will be asked to analyze the changes and continuity to the history of policing the border. It will also ask students to uncover the history and purpose of policing in general in the United States. Above you will find an 11-step lesson arc. Most of the lessons either have an actual assignment or materials that can be used to teach about the topic. I think that I might also incorporate a day of research on the lesson on the Border Patrol that has students look at different sources on the Border Patrol to see the way bias plays into how they are reported on. Depending on the media lens, the news stories on the Border Patrol and police brutality and detention center brutality is very different. Students should be encouraged to think about these issues in their political cartoons. As the unit of study begins, the teacher and students should feel free to explore the many issues that come up. How race and internalized racism plays out in this topic should also be explored and developed. The political cartoons should be shared widely, and perhaps making a tumblr or webpage to share the digitized cartoons with the greater school and larger community will let students have an authentic audience to inform, teach, and challenge people to think about Border Patrol and US/Mexican history in a new light.

Accommodations and Modifications: The assessment is very complex. Students need to be able to show mastery of the techniques used to make a political cartoon and decide what kind of message they want to convey to their audience. Students should be encouraged to utilize their creativity. If a student wanted to make a video or a gif instead that should be welcomed. Perhaps a student wants to use collage materials or write a graphic novel instead. I think students should work alone on this to demonstrate their unique perspective and view on the topic, but one accommodation might be to have students work in pairs.

Additional Resources:

Lyle-Hernandez, Kelly. *Migra! A History of the US Border Patrol*.

St. John, Rachel. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western US-Mexico Border*.

Marquez, JD. *Latinos as the "living dead": Raciality, expendability, and border militarization*.

Dunn, Tim. *Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*.

[Rivera, Kendra and Saraj J. Tracy. *Embodying emotional dirty work: a messy text of patrolling the border*](#)

References:

Rethinking History

PBS

NPR

Intercept

NY Times

Reflection:

Being at the NEH borderland institute at UTEP in El Paso has really challenged me to think about the multiplicities of history, narratives, and how to tell a story. I came to the institute with a fair amount of knowledge of history about the border, having taught and studied the Mexican American War, the Texas Rangers, and Western Expansionist Settler Colonialism. However, I still think I had a 'single- story' and narrative about what that history was. While I like to shy away from saying "well its more complicated than that" because I think that kind of rhetoric can silence people who are trying to express what they 'know' to be true about the border and particular the Border Patrol. But students (and teachers) should be pushed to get outside of either/or thinking.

One of the most impactful moments of the institute down here in the Borderlands, was the tour of the Border Wall by two Border Patrol Agents. Officer Roca was essentially to me a Texas Ranger, deciding who did and did not belong in this land. It was significant to me that the 'change' from this continuity was the racial/ethnic identity of the officer. About 51% of

border agents are self-identifying as Latinx. The Texas Rangers' job initially was to maintain the Anglo dominance of Texas. Now we can see that in the pursuit of power and acceptance in the United States, many people of Latinx descent are now helping in the pursuit of maintaining Anglo/White dominance in the United States. As Kelly Hernández writes in *Migra! A History of US Border Patrol*, "Policing Mexicans, in other words, presented officers with the opportunity to enter the region's primary economy and, in the process, shore up their tentative claims upon whiteness." The opportunity to have a 'good' stable, well-paying job and access a job with authority, leads to Latinx Americans doing the work of maintaining a White Hegemony in the United States.

My challenge with this unit, is to not make these (my own) analyses for my students. I want to encourage students to look at the history of the topic, grapple with their own pre-conceptions about it, and then be able to make a poignant and perhaps biting critique of it through their creative political cartoons. I am so excited to see what they produce. I think encouraging young people to find their voice and give them different modalities to express their views, will empower them to engage with the political process. This is why I believe sharing these political cartoons with a broader audience is essential as the last step to this unit.