

LATINO AMERICANS

Lesson Plan: Extranjeros and Expansion (For use with Episode 1)

Lesson Overview

Regions such as Texas, New Mexico and California had established Mexican and Indigenous communities already in place as the United States expanded westward in the mid-1800s. Students review the different ways that Mexican citizens came to terms with the expansion of the United States and the ways in which they became foreigners in their own lands within a very short time.

Grade: 7 – 12+ (content can be adapted for grades 4 – 6)

Time: Variable, 1 – 2 class periods

Materials

- Video Clips (*Juan Seguin, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Apolinaria Lorenzana, New Mexico*)
- **Extranjeros and Expansion Activity Sheet**
- Web access for clips and research
- [Map of North America circa 1830](#)

Lesson Objectives

- Identify the northern settlements that were part of New Spain and Mexico prior to incorporation in the United States.
- Document particular locations, dates and sequences of U.S. expansion into Mexico and connect the personal experiences of historical figures to these broader events.
- Examine U.S. expansion from the point of view of those who were absorbed into the nation.
- Compare the impact of expansion across Texas, New Mexico and California, with particular consideration of how prior residents responded and how they were treated.

Lesson Procedure

Pre-Activity: Show students a [map of North America circa 1830](#). Ask them to explain how it is different from the geography of today. Note who is in control of which territories — particularly the size of Mexico. Note who is absent from the map (Indigenous communities). Ask the students to think about the process through which

the 1830s boundaries changed to those of today. Use the *Mexican-American War clip* as a hook to open that inquiry.

Activity: After viewing the segment, explain that students will examine the story of U.S. expansion from the point of view of people in Texas, New Mexico and California.

Divide students into small research groups. Using film clips and the **Extranjeros and Expansion Activity Sheet**, each group will examine history from the point of view of particular characters and regions. They will detail locations, time frames and stories of at least two regions of Texas, California and New Mexico. Next they will track the tactics of U.S. expansion and examine the impact on Mexican citizens' wealth, rights and safety, contrasting formal treaty agreements with what actually happened. Students will examine the strategies used by early Mexican Americans to respond to political, economic and social change. After tracking this information on the activity sheet, they present their information to the entire class. All students respond to reflection questions in writing or through discussion.

Background Information:

"The lands that America wanted to occupy, in their imaginations they were empty, but in reality they were not. They were full of Indigenous people of one sort or another and in various parts of the country they were full of Spaniards and their descendants."

— Gary Gerstle, Historian

From the perspective of today, it can be difficult to imagine the fate of North America being in flux. But, this was exactly the case for many centuries. Only in the mid-1800s did the territorial borders that we are accustomed to, begin to take shape. St. Augustine was the first permanent European settlement in what is now the United States, founded over 50 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Santa Fe was founded eight years before Jamestown. The Spanish used missions and land grants to populate their northern holdings in California and other parts of the Southwest — all lands that eventually constituted the northern half of the new nation of Mexico.

In the early 1800s, the small nation of the United States grew exponentially with the Louisiana Purchase — some of which had already been transferred from Spain to France. Indigenous cultures struggled within this context to hold on to their ancestral lands and ways of life. Some, like the Comanche, proved more powerful than European-derived cultures. Mexico invited Anglo settlers from the United States to settle Texas in order to buffer the impact of the Comanche. But, these settlers brought with them the social and racial views of the Plantation economy and Anglo superiority. These views worked in concert with the evolving concept of Manifest Destiny — a notion of preordained right to conquer and rule North America from coast to coast. It was this notion — and the implied inferiority of non-Anglos like Indians and Latinos — that colored political, economic and social aspects of U.S. expansion.

This lesson looks at how this occurred in places like Texas, New Mexico and California and examines how Mexicanos responded to the changes happening around them. The

primary goal of this lesson is to help students understand the radically different geography of North America in the early 1800s and to invite them to examine U.S. expansion from diverse perspectives. The Latino experiences of the Southwest in the 1800s illustrate how our nation's growth has sometimes been in tension with its core values of equality, democracy and individual freedoms.

Note: *This lesson focuses mainly on the experience of Spanish-descent and mestizo Mexicans at the time of U.S. expansion. The experience of diverse Indigenous communities is a necessary component to understanding the implications of U.S. expansion and the contradictions it created that persist to this day. For more on this experience, including curricula, see the PBS production and curricula for [We Shall Remain](#). For more on understanding the impact of Spanish imperialism on Indigenous cultures, see [When Worlds Collide](#).*

EXTENSION I: Embracing a New Nation

View the clip on *Vallejo and the changing California*. Imagine you are a contemporary of Mariano Vallejo — a land-owning Californio. It's the early 1850s in northern California. You have embraced your new nation, the United States, which by treaty has granted you the rights and privileges of a citizen. But, you have noticed that as the Gold Rush continues to expand, more and more people have come from the eastern United States to seek their fortune. You begin to notice how Mexican Americans are being treated and portrayed. You also find that squatters have taken up residence on your rancho and local law enforcement does not respond to your requests for help. In fact, they have sided with the squatters. But, you do not take up arms. You have faith in the legal system of your new country. Write a letter to your representative in Congress to describe the changes happening around you and your concern for your rights and property.

EXTENSION II: Las Gorras Blancas: Freedom Fighters or Troublemakers?

In this activity, you'll view the segment on *Las Gorras Blancas* and then write two one-paragraph letters. First, you'll need to invent two fictional characters from late 1800s New Mexico. These will be the "voices" of the letters you write. One sees what Las Gorras Blancas do as an infringement of property rights and a violation of law and order, the other sees Las Gorras Blancas as "Robin Hood" type heroes. Both letters will describe the activities of Las Gorras Blancas, but in one, you will take a pro-position, and in the other, you will take an anti-position with respect to Las Gorras Blancas. Think carefully about the backstory of your characters to give them reason to make the arguments you suggest. Draw on the history of New Mexico to build the characters' voices in the letters.