

Latin American Immigration in Editorial Cartoons

Student Reading

Why Study Global Media Perspectives?

The global media play an essential role in the process of economic and cultural globalization. Today people in Mexico can view commentary from the United States by logging on to International News Network or Google News while people in the United States view Mexican perspectives by connecting to the *Mexico Channel* homepage or by viewing a video made by a young person from Mexico. Whenever we read a webpage, watch a YouTube video, glance at a magazine cover or listen to a podcast we are taking in messages about the world. These mediated messages are constructed for particular purposes, they come from a point of view, and they use certain techniques to influence the viewer, reader or listener. Our ability to make good choices depends on our ability to critically analyze and evaluate the media messages we receive.

Immigration as an Issue in the United States

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) reports that the number of net immigrants to the United States increased from just over 1 million between 1950-1955 to over 6 million between 1995 and 2000. In more recent years MPI reports that the percentage of foreign-born people in the United States has grown from 7.9% in 1990 to 12.1% in 2006. Some people in the United States welcome this rise in immigration as a part of the promise in the poem by Emma Lazarus which is inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" Some see immigrants as the economic engine that will fuel growth as the baby boom generation leaves the workforce. Yet others see the rise in immigration as a problem, arguing that people

enter the US. illegally and take jobs away from U.S. citizens.

Ever since passage of the Naturalization Act of 1790, which limited citizenship to "free white persons" of "good moral character" the U.S. has passed many laws in an effort to control immigration and define citizenship. In 1986, for example, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act which called for penalties for employers who hired workers who had not entered the country with a visa or legal permission. The law also called for increased funding for the United States Border Patrol, now part of the Department of Homeland Security.

Immigration Across the U.S. Mexico Border

The border between the U.S. and Mexico extends for nearly 2,000 miles and border crossings along that wide area has been the subject of much controversy ever since the Mexican American War of 1846. According to the Migration Policy Institute, since 1986 Mexico has consistently been the largest "sending country" of immigrants to the U.S. In 2006 13.7% of all immigrants came from Mexico, twice the number that came from China, the next largest country of origin in that year, and more than all immigrants from the entire continent of South America. Mexican immigration to the U.S. peaked in 1991 when nearly a million Mexican people crossed the border, or over 50% of the total immigrants to the U.S. that year.

The primary cause for recent large-scale Mexican immigration to the United States is economic, brought on by the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s when Mexico and other Latin American countries owed hundreds of millions of dollars that they did not have sufficient funds to repay.

Many Mexican immigrants come to the U.S merely wanting to be able to earn enough money to help send support back to family members who struggle with poverty in their home cities and villages.

The U.S. Mexico Border Fence

In 2006 President George W Bush signed the Secure Fence Act saying, "This bill will help protect the American people. This bill will make our borders more secure. It is an important step toward immigration reform." The Act called for hundreds of miles of additional fencing along the U.S. Mexico border, authorized more vehicle barriers, checkpoints and high technology surveillance techniques to prevent people from crossing the border. While some in the United States applauded this measure many in Latin America had a different opinion. This lesson invites you to explore a view of U.S. immigration policy and the Secure Fence Act from the point of view of 5 editorial cartoonists from 5 Latin American countries.

Questioning Media Perspectives Wherever You See Them

Whenever we receive media reporting, whether it be from Latin American media reports on immigration patterns or from U.S. news media reporting on border control it is always important to ask these key questions: Who produced this media document and for what purpose? Who might benefit from this media construction and who might be hurt? How credible is this information and what is left out that might be helpful to know? Consider these questions as you explore the material in the following lesson.

What are the cartoonists' messages about power in the Americas according to the documents below?



Angel Boligan "The Americas"



Dario Castillejos "First aid"