**CHAPTER 8**

**Hispanic Americans**

**Classroom Activities and Suggestions for Discussion**

1. Show your students a well-made documentary on Latino Americans and discuss it in relation to the concepts and theories in the textbook. Three good documentaries include:

* *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (1996, PBS; film is available for purchase from National Latino Communication Center). This is a superb documentary which addresses, among other topics, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, labor reform, Cesar Chávez and the United Farm Workers, Crystal City-based La Raza Unida, issues of education and political power of Mexican Americans. [NOTE: This is a four-hour feature, so you’ll probably want to select specific clips to show to your students.]
* *La Ciudad* (1998, PBS; film is available for purchase from Zeitgeist Films*). La Ciudad* illustrates issues of immigration and acculturation through the personal stories of illegal immigrants from Mexico and Latin America as they move to New York City. (88 minutes.)
* *Mixed Feelings* (PBS) explores the relationship between Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, California, and how each is shaping the other. According to the co-producer, Phillip Rodriguez, “These two cities, two very different cultural, economic conditions, sensibilities of these two cities, two civilizations, seem totally irreconcilable. And yet, that reconciliation is what we Mexican-Americans are about” (<http://www.latinola.com/)>. He also says that it “challenges many assumptions and approaches to U.S.-Mexico representation.” Also see http://www.mixedfeelings.org/html/description.html and http://www.losangelesfilm.org/film/filmmakers.html. You might ask student what concepts and theories from the book seem applicable for understanding the film-maker’s perspective.

1. Analyze the Rage Against the Machine (RATM) song “People of the Sun.” What is the band’s perspective? How does the band characterize the Spaniards’ take-over in Central America in 1516? How does this relate to more contemporary colonization efforts, including those by the U.S. government? (You may wish to note the line, “Blood drenched get offensive like Tet” as a reference to Vietnam.) How do students interpret the line, “whip snapped ya back/Ya spine cracked for tobacco”? How does RATM describe Los Angeles (“city of angels”?) in terms of “ethnic cleansing”? [Some suggest this line is a reference to California’s Proposition 187.] If the musicians from RATM were giving an interview about the meaning of this song, what concepts and theories from the book might they find useful in discussing it?
2. Analyze the Rage Against the Machine (RATM) song “Maria.” What is the perspective of the RATM regarding illegal border crossings, sweatshops/ maquiladoras, and other issues facing immigrants from Mexico? How do students interpret the line, “He whips her/Her soul chained to his will/My job is to kill if you forget to take your pill”? If the musicians from RATM were giving an interview about the meaning of this song, what concepts and theories from the book might they find useful in discussing it? Related to this activity, you might ask students to investigate recent deaths of those attempting to cross into the U.S. from Mexico. What are the most frequent causes of crossing deaths? What role do border smugglers, or “coyotes,” play in illegal immigration? What are the official (i.e., government) and unofficial responses to these deaths in both Mexico and the U.S.?
3. Have small groups of students analyze feature films for their portrayals of Latinos, including Latino Americans. Films might include (but are not limited to): *American Me* (1992, directed by Edward James Olmos), *And the Earth Did Not Swallow Him* (1994, directed by Severo Perez), *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982, directed by Robert M. Young), *Born in East L.A.* (1987, directed by Cheech Marin), *Captain from Castile* (1947, directed by Henry King), *Carlito’s Way* (1993, directed by Brian de Palma), *Cisco Kid* (the series of films from the 1950s;remade in 1994), *Crossover Dreams* (1985, directed by Leon Ichaso), *Duel in the Sun* (1946, directed by King Vidor), *El Mariachi* (1992, directed by Robert Rodriguez), *El Norte* (1983, directed by Gregory Nava), *Mi Familia* (My Family) (1995, directed by Gregory Nava), *Vida Loca* (My Crazy Life) (1994, directed by Allison Anders), *West Side Story* (1961, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins)**,** and*Crash* (2004, directed by Paul Haggis) . What major themes or stereotypes emerge in these films? Do the ideas and images change over time? Have students discuss their findings in relationship to the ideas from the text.
4. Ask students to role-play that they are recent immigrants who want to apply for particular kinds of visas or become citizens. Ask them to find out what they need to do to attain their goal. You might assign them a particular status (e.g., low-skilled worker, a highly skilled worker seeking an “extraordinary ability” visa, a student who wants to study in the U.S., a professor who wants to teach in the U.S.). Have them locate and complete the basic paperwork for their applications. What is required to qualify for these different types of visas? What are the requirements for naturalization (e.g., knowledge of U.S. history, good moral character)? How much time and money does this process usually take? Related to these issues, what are the grounds for asylum? How did the Violence Against Women Act change previously existing immigration law? Under what conditions can immigrants be admitted, refused or deported?

Types of visas that you might assign include:

* Visitor Visas
* Specialty Worker Visas
* Student Visas
* Extraordinary Ability Visas
* Visas for Temporary Nonagricultural Workers
* Religious Worker Visas
* Visas for Foreign Media Representatives
* A, G, and NATO Visas for Foreign Government Representatives
* Visas for Aliens Assisting Law Enforcement
* Visas for Athletes and Entertainers
* Visas for Artists and Entertainers
* Visas for Exchange Visitors
* Nonimmigrant Visas for Foreign Medical Graduates
* Visas for Irish Nationals
* Visas for Fiancées of U.S. Citizens
* Visas for International Cultural Exchange Visitors
* Visas for Registered Nurses
* Visas for Spouses and Minor Children of Permanent Residents
* Visas for Adopted Foreign Orphans

1. Ask students to interview recent immigrants about their experiences coming to this country. What motivated them to come here? What barriers did they face? What helped them with this process? What are their views on assimilation? Additionally, you might ask students to interview others about their attitudes regarding immigration. Are certain types of immigrants more desirable or deserving than others? Where did the subjects learn their ideas about immigration?
2. Ask your students to break into small groups and have them debate the benefits and costs of granting amnesty to undocumented migrants in the United States. Have them list the benefits and costs on a sheet of paper. Then, as a class, debate the benefits and costs based on these small group discussions. As an entire class, see if you can come to a consensus about this policy issue. What do they feel should be done about this problem? How would they address it, now that they have analyzed the costs and benefits?
3. Have your students view the film, “Yo soy Boricua, pa’que tu lo sepas!” ([2006](http://www.imdb.com/year/2006/?ref_=tt_ov_inf)). This documentary examines the history of New York’s annual Puerto Rican Day parade. Actress Rosie Perez directs and stars in this documentary about the immigration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland. Have your students respond to the following:

* How does assimilation theory apply to Puerto Ricans?
* Discuss Puerto Rican citizenship status in the U.S.
* Compare the socio-economic realities of Puerto Ricans compared to another Spanish speaking immigrant group.

1. Have your students view the film, “[Harvest of Loneliness](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1658805/?ref_=ttfc_fc_tt)“ (2010), directed by professors Gilbert G. Gonzalez (University of California, Irvine ) and Vivian Price (California State University). This film depicts the Bracero Program, a labor contract agreement between the U.S. and Mexico that propelled and encouraged the circulatory migration of about 4 million male sojourners to work in agribusiness during WWII and until the mid 1960’s. Assign a paper to your students that responds to the following, after they have viewed the film:
2. Conduct an Internet search using the following key terms (feel free to organize them in different ways): e.g., Temporary Foreign Worker, International Contract Labor program/s. Then, write about what you found. How are the temporary workers seen by or “treated” within the works/sites that you found? What did you expect and what did you find?

Discuss what you find when you enter “Bracero Program” in a search engine. How does what you find compare to what you saw in the film?

1. Find someone either you know directly or an acquaintance of a friend who immigrated (e.g., a refugee, whether for economic or political reasons) in the first half of the last century (1900-1949). Talk to the person about his or experience as an immigrant of that time period. Set up basic questions: place of origin, immigration permissions acquired before emigrating, reception in the U.S. once they were here, social program/s available to them (i.e., English classes, refugee assistance…). Compare what this person shares with you with what you have read and or viewed within this course section in regards to contemporary immigrant groups.
2. Go to the United States Census Bureau site. Find the variables/questions presented to those taking the most recent survey (in addition to the decennial Census, you will see information from the annual American Community Survey, conducted annually by the Census Bureau). What questions are asked about national origin and race? Now, research, via the same site or via Internet search (choosing a reputable source) when the Hispanic category first appeared on the U.S. decennial Census? What does this finding say about our understanding of the racialization of Latinos?