

# Immigration

## Lesson #7: THE HISPANIC FACE OF KANSAS

### TIME

50 minutes

### MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Video - *The Hispanic Face of Kansas* (28:30 minutes)

### OTHER MATERIALS

Television and VCR

### TEACHER PREPARATIONS

Read over the discussion questions in this lesson before watching the video.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) recognize various aspects of the Mexican American culture
- 2) determine what Mexican Americans can or should do to help ensure their involvement in Kansas's future
- 3) decide whether the Mexican American community is bicultural based on information presented in the video

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although the majority of Mexican immigrants settled in the Southwest and Colorado, the Mexican population on the Great Plains, particularly Kansas, also increased significantly. Many of these immigrants came to Kansas to escape poverty or the revolution in Mexico. This movement began around 1900 and was influenced by the growth of railroads in both Mexico and the United States, an increase in agricultural jobs, and the need for labor in the U.S. during and after World War I. By the late 1920s immigration laws effectively ended migration from Mexico. By 1930 the Mexican American population in Kansas was the seventh largest Mexican ancestral group in the United States and comprised the second largest population in the state, after Germans.

Although Mexican immigrants to Kansas came from virtually every state in northern and central Mexico, the majority came from Guanajuato and Michoacan. People from the same village or region often settled together in Kansas. This helped to create a sense of community identity and culture in an alien environment. Many Mexican Americans resided in urban areas. Mexican "colonias" or "barrios" formed in the main commercial centers along the rail lines or at the location of rail yards, shops, and roundhouses. The largest colonias were in Kansas City, Topeka, Emporia, Wichita, and Garden City.

Hispanics are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Kansas today. While the state's

population from 1970 to 1980 increased by 5 percent, the Hispanic population, largely of Mexican ancestry, increased by 35 percent. Between 1980 and 1990 the Hispanic population grew by 48 percent. By the year 2010 it is estimated that Hispanics in America will move past African Americans to become this country's largest minority group.

The Mexican American population in Kansas has preserved much of its Mexican culture. This has happened by continuing to practice traditions such as holding fiestas, celebrating Cinco de Mayo, and cooking and serving Mexican foods. By teaching traditions and customs to new generations of Mexican Americans, and by becoming more involved with the politics of its state and communities, the future of this bicultural Mexican American community is preserved.

## VOCABULARY

- **Bicultural** = Belonging to two distinct cultures.
- **Cinco de Mayo** = Day commemorating the defeat of French troops by Mexican citizens in the city of Pueblo in 1862.
- **Colonia** = A small settlement, sometimes part of a town, inhabited by Mexicans.
- **Mexican Revolution** = War between Spain and its Mexican colony from 1821 to 1824 that resulted in the independent nation of Mexico.
- **Quinceañera** = Coming of age ceremony for Mexican girls.

## ACTIVITY

- 1) Show the class the video *The Hispanic Face of Kansas*.
- 2) After watching the video have the class discuss issues raised in the video. The following questions may be used to help direct the discussion.

- What factors contributed to Mexicans leaving Mexico and coming to the United States and Kansas?

*Many left Mexico because of the revolution or the scarcity of jobs. Most of the immigration to Kansas came between 1900 and 1930. Work that used Mexican labor heavily included agricultural work, especially sugar beet production and processing and the railroad.*

- Did Mexicans and Mexican Americans face discrimination in Kansas?

*Yes. They were not allowed to eat in many restaurants, swim in public swimming pools, attend some public schools, etc.*

- Does the Mexican American community in Kansas continue to pass on its culture to the next generation? If so, how.

*Yes. Through traditional ceremonies like the Mexican wedding, the Quinceañera, fiestas, food, and more.*

- What does the future look like for Mexican Americans living in Kansas? What can Mexican Americans do to help ensure their future prosperity in Kansas?

*Bright. They need to become more active in politics and business so that the concerns of Mexican Americans can take their place in the future growth and development in Kansas. Current generations have more prospects due to better education and the work of previous generations to move the Mexican American population more into the mainstream of the population without losing its heritage.*

- Will the Mexican heritage of the Mexican American population continue to be alive and visual in Kansas? If so, why?

*Yes. The Mexican American community is actively teaching and involving the youth in their heritage. This will help to ensure the continuation of this culture.*

- A bicultural community is one in which two cultures exist together in one community. Is the Mexican American community bicultural? If so, how.

*Yes. Throughout the video are examples of how the Mexican heritage of the Mexican American population continues in Kansas. In all of these examples this heritage has adapted to fit within the culture of Kansas. Examples of this would include the utensils used in preparing food, variations in fiestas and what they involve, and the use of English in wedding ceremonies.*

#### **EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

- 1) See the complementary lessons in this manual: "What is Culture?," "Existing Side by Side: Bicultural Communities," and all the lessons within the section "The Heritage Continues."
- 2) View the video *Hispanic Culture Series: Mexican People and Culture* included in this trunk.