

## **Los Primeros: Latine Wisconsin and Milwaukee**

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Courses:** Ethnic Studies, Social Studies, Civics

**Topics:** Wisconsin History, Local History, Immigration, Identity, Construction of Community

**Suitable for:**

- A cultural diversity course or unit exploring the social implications of immigration, especially local reactions and how immigrant communities settle into a new place.
- A higher-level history course examining the impacts of immigration legislation and context of immigration in the 1920s-30s.

### **Objectives**

- ▶ Students will learn about patterns of immigration from Mexico to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the 1920-30s. They will understand the historical context surrounding the time period's migration trends.
- ▶ Students will examine the settlement process of Mexican immigrants in the 1920s and 30s, recognizing both the struggles encountered throughout settlement as well as the ways in which Mexican immigrants responded to those struggles, demonstrating perseverance and solidarity through the formation of community.
- ▶ Students will connect the discussed history to themselves/our current communities and society through discussion.

This lesson plan consists of a video resource, note sheet/individual question handout, and a paired/group/classroom discussion. Additional resources, which expand on the lesson topic, are provided towards the end of this document.

**Teacher Resource:** This [google folder](#) contains resources and discussions regarding the term/identity "latine/o/x".

## **From the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies**

This lesson plan was developed by undergraduate student Boston Peters in summer 2025 under a Support for Undergraduate Research Fellows (SURF) grant through the UWM Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), supervised by the UWM Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) Associate Director, Monica VanBladel.

This, and more teaching resources developed under the research grant, can be found on <https://uwm.edu/clacs/public-engagement/teaching-resources/k-12-lesson-plans-surf-2025-26/>.

Please note that the UWM CLACS website will be redesigned in 2026, resulting in a change of the website's stable URL. When this occurs, the link provided above will no longer be functional. The new website will prominently feature available educator resources, including this one.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies is a member institution of the national Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP). CLASP also develops and shares a wide variety of K-12 educator resources on its website: <https://claspprograms.org/k-12-educators/>.

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The following lesson may include state standards and/or "I can" statements related to the lesson content. These standards/statements were initially added as an educational framework for lesson design and may not be exhaustive.

This document may include hyperlinks. A page at the end of the document has been added to provide the URL included in each hyperlink, as well as other information about where the hyperlink leads. This information is intended to assist in finding the linked webpage if the hyperlink no longer functions.

## Primary Lesson Resource (video)

Watch [Milwaukee's First Mexican Community | Watch on PBS Wisconsin](#)

- Note that this video is the length and format of a traditional college-level lecture. In order to make the content manageable for students, there is a “Video Sections by Topic” section below which splits the lecture into its various categories. Accompanying worksheet questions are categorized by video section. With this, you can choose which parts of the video to show and utilize the most relevant questions for selected sections.
- This document provides a handout/collection of questions useful for checking students’ understanding of the video. Allow students time to preview questions before watching the video. If they would like, they can take notes on the questions during, but it is recommended you allow some time for students to work on the questions after watching the lecture.

## Video Sections by Topic

0	Speaker Introduction of Sergio González	0:00 - 1:04
1	Topic Introduction, Context Un Día Sin Latinos (2016)	1:04 - 5:00
2	Raphael Baez Early Mexican Immigrants	5:00 - 8:40
3	Immigration Law, Importable Labor Shortage Birds of Passage, Enganchistas Labor Strikes	8:40 - 15:37
4	Settlement Experience of Los Primeros Racial Discrimination	15:37 - 21:42
5	Chain Migration Educational Experience of Mexican Children	21:42 - 24:24
6	Creation of Community Spaces Development of a Religious Home	24:24 - 29:35
7	Solidarity with the Catholic Church in Mexico	29:35 - 32:22
8	Mutual Aid Societies	32:22 - 34:08
9	The Great Depression Anti-Immigration Sentiment, Repatriation	34:08 - 36:16
10	Conclusion Connection to Today*	36:16 - 38:19

\*In connecting to the present day, there are references to current immigration policy and legislation. This includes an allusion to the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the U.S. President at the time of the lecture's release.

Questions will be listed as follows, with the first number denoting video section and the second number representing a typical ordered list (rest for each new video section):

### 1.1. *Question?*

For this question, video sections 6, 7, and 8 are all relevant to the answer:

**6-8.1.** *In what way(s) did Mexican immigrants establish a community for themselves as they settled in Wisconsin?*

1.1. *Who are “Los Primeros”?*

2.1. *Who is Raphael Baez? How did his experience differ from that of Los Primeros? How is it alike?*

3.1. González mentions that the arrival of Los Primeros in Wisconsin in the 1920s is largely due to changes in federal immigration law. *Why did the U.S. government restrict immigration from Europe (and ban immigration from Asia) following World War One? How did this restriction affect U.S. businesses?*

3.2. *How did the restriction of immigration from Europe affect U.S. businesses?*

3.3. *Why did these immigration acts increase immigration from Mexico? How are these two trends related?*

3.4. *What or who does the term “enganchista” refer to? What role did enganchistas play?*

3.4. In 1920, Pfister & Vogel had their Mexican workers live and sleep inside the factory where they worked. The company even hired Y.M.C.A. instructors to provide recreation for employees during off-hours. *Why did Pfister & Vogel make its Mexican employees live in the factory where they worked?*

4.1. As a result of U.S. immigration law changes, in the 1920s, around 50,000-100,000 Mexican immigrants came to the U.S. each year. *How were these Mexican immigrant workers received by those living in Milwaukee?*

5.1. Around the 22-minute mark, González introduces the term "chain migration" to discuss a shift in who from Mexico was coming to Milwaukee. *What does the term mean? What change does it describe?*

6-8.1. *In what way(s) did Mexican immigrants establish a community for themselves as they settled in Wisconsin?*

9.1. Gonzalez notes that, by the late 1920s/early 1930s, the Mexican community had found a cultural foothold in city life. *Following that era, how did the Great Depression (1929-1941) affect the Mexican community in Milwaukee / Wisconsin?*

**Additional Notes:**

These can include...

- A question I have
- A mentioned topic that I'd like to revisit
- Connections to other classes
- Connections to current events

## Worksheet: **SAMPLE ANSWERS**

**NOTE:** Sample answers are not provided for all questions.

**2.1.** *Who is Raphael Baez? How did his experience differ from that of Los Primeros? How is it alike?*

**A:** Raphael Baez was a classically trained musician, recruited by an opera company to perform music in the United States. His arrival in the United States predates the existence of Milwaukee's first Mexican community. The main difference between him and Los Primeros is that Los Primeros were primarily agricultural workers. One similarity is that both Baez and Los Primeros were recruited to come work in the United States.

**3.1.** *González mentions that the arrival of Los Primeros in Wisconsin in the 1920s is largely due to changes in federal immigration law. Why did the U.S. government restrict immigration from Europe (and ban immigration from Asia) following World War One? How did this restriction affect U.S. businesses?*

**A:** These federal immigration laws were driven by the discourse of who is a "true American". Nativists believed that immigrants who defined themselves by more than one ethnicity posed a threat to the desired "American character". This led to the desire to curb immigration, especially immigration from places deemed "less American".

**3.2.** *How did the restriction of immigration from Europe affect U.S. businesses?*

**A:** Reducing immigration reduced incoming labor to the United States, creating labor shortages. These shortages made it harder for businesses to find workers.

**3.3.** *Why did these immigration acts increase immigration from Mexico? How are these two trends related?*

**A:** American businesses were upset with the aforementioned labor shortage and lobbied Congress to try and find a solution. Congress' solution was exempting all of the Western Hemisphere (Canada and Latin America) from the immigration restrictions, allowing for immigrants from Mexico to come and work in the United States.

**6-8.1.** *In what way(s) did Mexican immigrants establish a community for themselves as they settled in Wisconsin?*

**A:** One way Mexican immigrants established community was through religious connections; they were able to connect with other groups through their Catholic faith. They also formed mutual aid societies, some of which started Milwaukee's first newspapers in Spanish. Businesses were formed, which sold groceries necessary to make food staples. Furthermore, the establishment of community spaces gave them the ability to hold cultural celebrations.

**9.1.** Gonzalez notes that, by the late 1920s/early 1930s, the Mexican community had found a cultural foothold in city life. Following that era, how did the Great Depression (1929-1941) affect the Mexican community in Milwaukee/Wisconsin?

**A:** Mexican Americans were often the first fired from their jobs as they were seen as “surplus labor”. Some returned to Mexico while others couldn’t due to the cost of travel. Those who remained in the United States—many citizens—were targeted for deportation due to growing anti-immigrant sentiment at that period in time.

## **Classroom Discussion Questions**

These questions are compiled for a classroom/group discussion after watching the video lecture. Questions relevant to specific video sections have been marked, while those addressing a broad theme throughout the video are not.

*Which point from the handout do you find most interesting, and why?*

*Which point from the handout do you find most confusing?*

*What part of the lecture was most surprising to you? Most interesting?*

González mentions many immigrant communities in Milwaukee: German, Polish, Slavic, Irish, as well as Mexican. As each group adapted to the local culture, they maintained connections to their culture of origin.

*What are the pros and cons of this kind of "hyphenated" identity?*

- *How were Mexican-American immigrant experiences different from those of European-Americans?*
  - *How did these differences manifest in public spaces? Schools? Churches?*
- *González mentions the concepts of dual-citizenship and dual-identities. What do you understand these terms/concepts to mean?*

**2.1.** *Why is the difference between the experiences of Raphael Baez and Los Primeros significant?*

**6-8.1.** In the lecture, Gonzalez emphasizes mutual aid, business ownership, religious spaces, and cultural celebrations as important ways that Los Primeros built community.

*What does community look like for you?*

- *Who do you think of as your community?*
- *Where do you find community?*
- *How do you build community?*
- *How do you contribute to your community?*

## **Additional Resources**

A historical overview of Latinx people in Wisconsin: [Historical Overview | WLHC](#). This overview is written by Sergio González, the same historian who gave the lecture utilized in this lesson plan.

The Mexicans of the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin report by Agnes Fenton (mentioned by González in his lecture) is available as a primary source: [Mexican-Americans in Milwaukee, 1930](#). Because this is a primary source, students should be prepared to read critically and with an understanding of the author's potential biases.

## Links and Citations

“[UWM RESOURCES: Latine cultural identities discussions](#)” by Salvador Prado and Prof. Nancy Bird-Soto (2024), project supported by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Office for Undergraduate Research and Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1lwE95ZVij8ydkzlOCd1lOYUAKtBRCbWD>.

“[Milwaukee's First Mexican Community](#)” lecture by Sergio González (16 August 2016), as part of PBS Wisconsin’s University Place virtual lecture hall series, <https://pbswisconsin.org/watch/university-place/milwaukees-first-mexican-community-rllblr/>.

“[Latinx in Wisconsin: A Historical Overview](#)” by Sergio González as part of the Wisconsin Latinx History Collective, <https://www.latinxwisconsin.org/historical-overview>.

“[The Mexicans of the City of Milwaukee](#)” by Agnes Fenton (1930) hosted by the Wisconsin Historical Society on [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org) (page titled “Wisconsin Mexican-Americans in Milwaukee, 1930”), <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1702>.

Below are additional resources that were referenced while producing this lesson plan.

“[Latinx Wisconsin and Milwaukee](#)” blog post on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s ÑAPA archive (1 October 2021), <https://uwm.edu/clacs/latinx-wisconsin-and-milwaukee/>.