

**Course: American Government  
Institutions and Public Policy**

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This lesson may be used for an Introduction to American Government course. Typically, the course is an overview of the theory, structure, institutions and processes of American Government, as well as public policy, civil liberties and civil rights. This lesson may be used in discussions about institutions, foreign policy, and civil rights. The lesson below illustrates how the institutions of the federal government can be taught with reference to the experiences of Latinos in the US and the Western Hemisphere.

**Lesson 1: President**

“The Politics of NAFTA and Migration: The Case of the Displaced Mexican Farmer”

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will understand the role of the president and Congress in foreign policy, in this case, as it concerns the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) a trade treaty between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.
2. Student will explore the public policies (NAFTA) behind the migration of millions of Mexicans to the U.S. over the last 20 years.
3. Students will explore the complexity of the issue of migration. This lesson adds the role of agricultural corporations to the discussion about migration to the U.S.
4. Students will understand the impact of NAFTA on displaced Mexican farmers and their experience as victims of NAFTA and agribusinesses in Mexico and their experience with U.S. immigration policies and agribusinesses in the US.

Description:

This lesson teaches the institutions of the US Government, in particular the powers of the Congress and the President in crafting U.S. foreign policy, and the impact of U.S. foreign policy on the experience of displaced Mexican farmers who are forced to migrate to the U.S. in search of employment. The lesson will highlight the connection between public policy, international trade agreements, and migration to the U.S.

This lesson will be covered in one week, broken up into two days of instruction.

Day 1

***Step 1***

Lecture on the Constitutional Powers of the President. Highlighting the President’s role as Chief Diplomat. Students will have read the textbook chapter on the President.

The lecture will entail describing the President’s power to craft U.S. foreign policy, including his role in negotiating treaties and agreements with other countries.

***Step 2***

Illustrate the role of the president in foreign policy by providing examples, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The instructor will provide brief historical background of the agreement illustrating the role of the President and of Congress. The class will be broken up into small groups. Each group will be given several key articles of the treaty. Students will be asked to read and decode the provisions of the treaty and come to conclusions. To help students think this through the instructor will provide students with several questions to answer including:

1. State why you think this provision was made? What did the president think the outcomes would be?
2. Do you think that the public had any understanding of this provision?
3. What do you predict the future impact of the provision would be?

The full text of the treaty may be found at: [www.sice.oas.org/trade/nafta/naftatce.asp](http://www.sice.oas.org/trade/nafta/naftatce.asp)

The instructor may also want to mention the twenty-year anniversary of NAFTA and President Obama's ongoing negotiation (and request for fast-track authority from Congress) of the controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement.

### ***Step 3***

Homework assignment: Students are to read the article entitled "How US Policies Fueled Mexico's Great Migration," written by David Bacon (*The Nation*, January 4, 2012).

Students are to answer the following questions based on the reading:

1. What caused Mr. Ceja and Mr. Ortega to migrate to the US?
2. According to the article, who was the primary beneficiary of NAFTA? Explain how?
3. How have rural areas in Mexico been impacted by NAFTA? Explain.
4. Describe the experience of undocumented workers in Smithfield's slaughterhouse in North Carolina.
5. How did the article affect your perspective about undocumented immigration to the US?

Day 2:

### ***Step 4***

In class discussion, students share their answers to the questions above. The students are then broken up into small groups in order to analyze and think critically about the following themes/questions. They then share their views with the class.

1. Concerning the power of the President in foreign policy: What powers did the president have in negotiating and implementing this treaty and its provisions?
2. Concerning the international and domestic consequences of trade policy in general, and NAFTA in particular: From your readings, what were the effects of NAFTA on various constituencies in the U.S. and Mexico?
3. Concerning immigration: What are the experiences of Mexican migrants? And what public economic policies create "push" factors for migration?
4. Concerning the power of corporate agribusinesses: How did corporate agribusinesses take advantage of NAFTA? What specifically did they do?
5. Linking the struggles for immigrant rights with the struggle of labor rights – the struggle of workers: What did you learn about the workers in the Tar Heel slaughterhouse plant?

Describe their workplace experiences there? What did they do in their effort to improve wages and working conditions?

***Step 5***

As an in class activity, students will be broken up into small groups and asked to brainstorm on the following question:

If you were an elected official how would you plan to address the issues pertaining to displaced workers migrating to the US?

***Step 6***

Each group will have a note taker who will report the groups determinations to the class. Each groups' policy proposals will be put on the board and discussed by the whole class.

List of Materials:

1. David Bacon, "How US Policies Fueled Mexico's Great Migration," *The Nation*, January 4, 2012.
2. Benjamin Ginsberg, et al., "The Presidency" in *We The People* (New York: Norton, 2015), pp. 310-339. Nearly every American Government textbook has a chapter on the "Presidency" and most have chapters on "Foreign Policy."
3. NAFTA Treaty. The full text of the treaty may be found at:  
[www.sice.oas.org/trade/nafta/naftatce.asp](http://www.sice.oas.org/trade/nafta/naftatce.asp)