

## **La Frontera: An Application of the Theoretical Perspectives of Sociology**

*Barbara Prillaman*

### **Introduction**

*“Mexico and the US are bound not only because of the common border, but by a shared culture and history.” Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador*

After serving in the Peace Corps in Ecuador, two friends and I set off on the adventure only young, idealists can have – a small backpack, little money, the knowledge of a new language and six weeks ahead of them! The clothes I had worn and washed on a rock for two years were in the worn-down leather bag: two pairs of pants (jeans and khakis), a thin denim button down oxford shirt and a black turtleneck. Round those outfits out with a scarf, light sweater, and some underwear – I was set to go.

During my time in Ecuador I had walked across the border into Colombia on various occasions with townspeople I worked with. Soldiers with machine guns lined the official crossing area in which one needed to show identification. Although my fellow townspeople did not fear going into Colombia, I did. During that time period, being different could mean being singled out. I had heard of accounts in which Americans had been kidnapped and/or killed. Who knew what was true or not, being in a remote village in the Andes Mountains, I did not have many opportunities to get the facts straight or listen to the news. Even within the country of Ecuador, buses had to stop at each of the provinces for the *Control de Aduana* officials to get on the bus. It was always a bit nerve-wracking for me as usually the only *gringa* (someone from the United States) onboard. A few times I was taken off and brought into their offices as they “checked on” my identification sometimes expecting a payoff to let me back on another bus.

Heading south into Peru, my friends and I found ourselves in a different situation. We walked through the small town bustling with energy, dried out dirt roads, military tanks with heavily armed soldiers; we realized we had no idea where the Border Patrol office was located. We needed to get our passports stamped, noting that we were leaving Ecuador and entering Peru. My friend, Sharon, approached a young woman and asked where the Border Control Office was located. The woman pointed to a small building yards behind us! We had crossed over and never knew it.

Defined as “the line or frontier area separating political divisions or geographic regions; a boundary,”<sup>1</sup> a border and crossing it means different things to different people. In my experience it meant fear at times, ignorance at others, and, certainly adventure. My participation in *The American West as Place, Process, and Story* Seminar afforded me the opportunity to learn that this holds true for our American West, and in the case that I am going to highlight, *La Frontera* between Mexico and the United States. The course for which I am writing this unit uses a textbook that focuses on this border to explain the three sociological perspectives. To be able to provide students with some history and specific examples of the relationship between the two countries will help them to better understand the big picture and relate this to those sociological perspectives.

### **Rationale/Demographics**

Two years ago in the spring, when our principal mentioned that our school would offer its second community college course, *Sociology*, I was unable to contain my excitement, practically yelling out with joy. Although I already had a very diverse teaching schedule, I began to think about what I could do with this type of course. After all, sociology is my undergraduate degree. Wouldn't I be a perfect candidate? I taught our school's Psychology course....this fit perfectly – psychology/self and sociology/society. And so I began my journey to teach this course. A course that I had experience with – twenty years ago!

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a school completing its transition, changing into a science/biotechnology magnet school serving students in grades 6 – 12. This year it houses all of these grades making the student population close to 1100. It is considered an urban school, situated on the outskirts of the most populated city in the state of Delaware. CSS students come from all over our state's largest county. The school's popularity is obvious as lots of families complete the *Choice* application process seeking admission to our school. At the high school level, students can choose to focus on a variety of learning “strands” such as biotechnology, biomedical science, nursing, physical therapy/athletic healthcare, and veterinary science. Additionally, a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered as well as three dual-enrollment courses that are in conjunction with our local community college, Del Tech. I am now the teacher of one of these courses, *Sociology*.

Although my undergraduate degree is in Sociology, it has been many years since I have read texts and engaged in the content. I am very interested in creating units for this course that follow the textbook that is used for the course which is the same one that is used at the local community college. It is a college text, based on “modules” in which

real-life examples (countries such as Mexico, China, Greenland, etc.) are used to explain the sociological concepts. I have noticed that the students are having some difficulty in comprehending the text/sociological concepts and, I believe, with my limited familiarity with the content that I am not helping as much as I could. Although it would seem as if these real-life examples would help students it seems like there is some disconnect between the information, examples, and the students. With one year of teaching the new course under my belt, I headed to New Haven his past summer to attend the Yale National Teacher Institute. There, through my participation in the Narratives of Race and Citizenship since Emancipation Seminar I created a unit that focused on the concept of race. My research allowed me to focus on the big sociological ideas of racial classification, attitudes, and actions. Through this work it is my hope that students would be able to apply the sociological perspectives to the concept of race. The unit on race happens later in the curriculum sequence so I still needed a baseline unit, one that went into depth about the sociological perspectives so that students would gain the solid grasp of the three perspectives.

My participation in *The American West as Place, Process, and Story* Seminar is enabling me to create that unit for this Sociology course. Our first unit/module of study focuses on comparing the major theoretical approaches of sociology – Functionalist, Conflict, and Symbolic Interactionist using the Mexican/United States border as the real-world example. The College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives that I follow are to *identify the three major theories and compare and contrast each perspective*. My beginning thoughts for the unit were to focus on the Mexican border – as does the text – but in an in-depth fashion. I wanted my students to be able to view the border in two ways (1) the *definition of border* from the sociological perspectives and (2) as a *changing element* in the Southwest – as it pertains to the cultural makeup of the Southwest. Seminar Leader Joyce reminded me to think about this in political, geographic, and historical terms. So, taking these comments to heart and from my participation in our seminar, I now knew that I wanted to incorporate the “human factor” of the border. I want to be certain that students understand the borderlands peoples’ stories. In doing so, I believe that students will better comprehend the three sociological perspectives and have a better foundation for understanding sociology.

Recently, our district social studies consortium has begun to focus on the Common Core State Standards and how we can support these through the teaching of how to effectively read informational texts. We are trying to map out the interpretation and application of the standards indicating what types of activities align with them. In this unit, I would like for my students to focus on the Common Core’s Integration of

Knowledge and Ideas section under History/Social Studies. Listed as CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9, students are to integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources. A variety of texts (both for reading and viewing) will be used in this unit. From the comprehension of these texts, students will be developing an understanding of the Mexican/United States Border via sociological perspectives.

As a caretaker, a community builder in the classroom, it is important to me that students feel comfortable. I know this helps with the learning process – if students feel supported and safe they are more willing to take chances in their learning. This is essential to our distance learning class since we are in two different locations (our school and a sister school in our district) and trying to forge relationships and a sense of community via cameras across distances. I spend much of the year trying to have students think from a sociologist's point of view not a personal one. Using this unit as a catalyst, students will begin to get a handle on this – seeing the border from the sociological perspectives while gaining insight into the human stories. In doing so, we can differentiate between the two yet still see how they are intertwined.

In this proposed unit, students will focus on the guiding questions: What are the three major theoretical approaches of sociology? How can one compare and contrast each of the perspectives? What is the definition of a border? What are the causes and consequences of borders including the opportunities and barriers for those who encounter them? This particular unit is designed for high school juniors and seniors who choose to take this social sciences course as an elective. Due to scheduling requirements, most of them tend to be seniors who have already met their graduation requirements. These students must complete and pass a basic literacy test given by the local community college to gain entrance. Additionally, their families must pay a reduced tuition fee. This ensures if they complete the work and pass with a predetermined grade average, they will receive community college credit. This year there are fifteen students enrolled in the course – thirteen at my school and two at the sister school site to which this course is broadcast. These students vary in many aspects – race, ethnicity, work ethic, and skills set. Although I have been a teacher for seventeen years, this is only my fifth year that I have worked with high school students and the second one teaching in a distance learning laboratory. My experience prior to that is with middle school English Language Learners (ELLs) students whom I still work with (about one third of my teaching load). So, working with the high school students challenges me to relate to students whose needs are different as young adults in the mainstream population and to create lessons that are more rigorous in content especially as it is, in reality, a community college course. I

appreciate this challenge and it is one of the reasons why I enjoy participating in the Delaware Teacher Institute. I am able to spend my time researching a particular aspect of content that I had been unfamiliar with yet needed to teach about.

## **Content**

The content portion of this unit is divided into distinct sections that all, when combined, will help students to better understand the unit's guiding questions. As seminar leader Joyce mentioned, students need to access to the political, geographic, and historical information to be able to truly see the border as it is today. The content sections include information about the three sociological perspectives and their example: Functionalist (Undocumented Immigration), Conflict (Manifest Destiny), and Symbolic Interactionist (the Border).

### Sociological Perspectives

My students arrive to our class with little to no prior knowledge about most of the content that we will delve into throughout the year. However, I do appreciate how the textbook uses relevant, real-life examples to help students try to understand this better, making the content less dry and more meaningful at the same time. Information about the foundation – the three sociological concepts – are relevant to a student's understanding and will be applied to the concept of the Mexican/U.S.A border.

There are three sociological perspectives that guide our studies throughout the year: Functionalist, Conflict, and the Symbolic Interactionist. These theories “offer a set of guiding questions and key concepts that address how societies operate and how people relate to one another.”<sup>2</sup> These guiding questions and key concepts are viewed as a framework to be able to interpret a particular issue or event (in this case the border). Our year-long study of sociology begins with building a strong understanding of these perspectives so that students will be able to apply these theories to the many societal topics we cover such as gender, race, family, education, and politics, among others.

#### *Functionalist Perspective*

The functionalist theory highlights “how the ‘parts’ of society contribute in expected and unexpected ways to social order and stability and to social disorder and instability.”<sup>3</sup> The central question regarding this theory is, *How do the parts of society contribute to social order/disorder and stability/instability?*<sup>4</sup> The idea here is that society is made up of

many different parts that all contribute to its functioning – positively or negatively. Our textbook relates this theory to that of a human body – each body part has an individual function but they all are interrelated and interdependent. This is just like society. Each part, whether it is a law or a custom, helps society function.<sup>5</sup> Members of society try to reach “social consensus or cohesion” in which societal members work towards what is best for society.<sup>6</sup> Emile Durkheim noted that there were two types of solidarity within a society – mechanical (seen in simple societies where people are bound together by the same values, beliefs, and common work) and organic (evident in more complex societies such as today’s metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, Beijing, and Buenos Aires in which people are interdependent as their workload is different). Additionally, the American sociologist, Robert Merton further detailed the overall effect of “the parts overall effect on society, not just its contribution to order and stability”<sup>7</sup> as the manifest functions (intended effects), latent functions (unintended effects), dysfunctions (disruptive consequence), and manifest dysfunctions (anticipated disruptions) Students must be aware that within this perspective there is a balance of the positive and negative effects and defends the existing social arrangements.

### *Conflict Perspective*

“The conflict perspective focuses on conflict over scarce and valued resources and the strategies dominant groups use to create and protect social arrangements that give them an advantage over subordinate groups.”<sup>8</sup> The principal question of this perspective is, “*Who benefits from a particular social pattern or arrangement, and at whose expense?*”<sup>9</sup>. This perspective focuses on the inevitable conflicts of all types and was born from Karl Marx’s work on class struggle. His economic focus spoke to society’s two groups, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and their connection to the means of production. The bourgeoisie consists of the group that is closest to the means of production, owning and being in charge of land, labor, machinery, etc. while the proletariat comprises the group that owns nothing except for the labor that they provide. The bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat giving them only a fraction of the profit that they make for their labor. Obviously, in societies there are those who have or gain the resources while others do not – the haves and the have nots. This *struggle* leads to the consequence of dominant and subordinate groups. Dominant group members fight to maintain their interests through the use of a variety of means. This includes a concept entitled a facade of legitimacy in which dominant group members justify their reasons for the why of what they have while subordinate group members continue their struggle to obtain some of the resources. The dominant group does this by sustaining the beliefs that the subordinate group is truly

benefiting from the situation (has work, for example) and blaming them for their flaws that are preventing them from “their chances of financial success.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Symbolic Interactionist Perspective*

The third theory, Symbolic Interactionist, was introduced in the 1920s by sociologist George H. Mead. It centers on the question “*How do involved parties experience, interpret, influence, and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting?*”<sup>11</sup> To answer this question, sociologists focus on the interactions of people, paying attention to their use of their reflexive thinking. For example, when people are interacting with others sociologists would pay close attention to the symbols used to express themselves, interpreting these using their own prior knowledge about these symbols.<sup>12</sup> People make meaning of their personal interactions by using what they already know.

### Immigration/Migration (Functionalist Perspective Application)

From the beginning of time people have been on the move. Through the study of immigration/migration students learn about people within their own country and throughout the world. Students become familiar with world locations to be able to discuss intelligently with others what is happening and where. Our world is becoming smaller through the advancement of transportation and telecommunications. We see events in Africa or Asia on the television or read about them in the newspaper. . Now, more than ever, immigration is of importance to citizens and residents of the United States.

As the world is getting smaller and we are becoming more interdependent on each other, what happens somewhere else does affect us. In just hours or days we can cross oceans and travel through air to accept or deliver goods and services that are needed or wanted. Through television, telephones, and computers we exchange ideas and conversations that in the past would have taken months to receive because of slow boat travel. We also share our world; the land, air, and water; if we misuse these things, we are all affected. Our world is changing and we need to face the challenges that are a product of these changes.

The study of immigration allows us to understand issues that have affected the United States in the past, how the waves of immigration to the United States have shaped our politics, our economy, and our history. The study of immigration is the study of how the United States became what it is today, and how it is becoming what it will be tomorrow. By looking forward, as well as back, the study of immigration also nurtures tolerance – a disposition that is critical for peaceful coexistence in our pluralistic society.

I was fortunate to have a course at the University of Delaware during my graduate coursework with Dr. Mark Miller, a well-known professor focusing on international immigration/migration studies. During that time I became fascinated with the subject. A few things stuck in my memory about what I learned: immigration/migration is a pattern that has occurred throughout history; there have been many issues surrounding immigration/migration patterns of those countries to which people are going as well as leaving – all of which are more similar than different in varying areas of the world; and immigration/migration has to do with economics – who has the resources and who does not. Students in my course most likely have studied a bit about immigration/migration and patterns of people’s movement but I am afraid from what I have heard in the hallways, that their understanding of immigration between Mexico and the United States may be limited. I think that a focus on Dr. Miller’s presentation remarks from the 2008 Conference on International Migration and Development<sup>13</sup>, *Migration Development: Past, Present, and Future*, will nicely sum up historical points that are important for students to understand about the reasons for immigration/migration; true reasons for the *why*. Reviewing terms about immigration, migration, push and pull forces, amongst others may also be necessary.

The following texts will be a follow-up to Dr. Miller’s piece enabling students to focus on the human factor of immigration/migration. It seems obvious, but many do not understand the simple idea that people move to make their situation better. In doing so, they may suffer and sacrifice. People leave all they know behind – their language, way of life, and family to go to another area and make something better of their situation and themselves. This was the case even for those who moved out west. Some wanted a better life for themselves and their families or to escape a bad situation. Three texts will help to demonstrate the human component: *El Norte* (film), *Guatemala: In the Shadow of the Raid* (documentary), and *Dying to Cross* (book).

### *El Norte Film*

This film tells the tale of a brother and sister that flee political and racial persecution in their small, Guatemalan town after their father has been murdered for trying to “unionize” workers in the coffee growing business and their mother is arrested. They travel to “El Norte” to Los Angeles where they begin to work. The ups and downs of undocumented workers are depicted in the film as both Enrique and Rosa begin to get accustomed to their lives in the United States. Humorous and sad at the same time, this

film will give students the “human” factor of what it means to be an immigrant – undocumented at that.

*Guatemala: In the Shadow of the Raid*

*Frontline* has a 16-minute segment about the raid of a meat-packing plant in a small town in the rural mid-west town, Postville. Many undocumented workers were caught while working in the plant. The owners were fined and the plant later closed down due to bankruptcy. Over a fifth of the town’s population was deported or left the area. The film explains the process of the death of this town after the raid as well as the “sister towns” in Guatemala. I want students to understand that we are not so far from this type of situation here in Delaware. In the southern most part of our state, there are many Latin Americans who work in the chicken processing plants. Additionally, over the state line in Pennsylvania, they constitute the majority of workers in the mushroom houses. What might happen if these people no longer provided their services?

*Dying to Cross Book Excerpts and C-SPAN Video*

Students will read the book as well as watch an interview with the author to gather evidence of the risks people take and the reasons behind them to travel across a border. Relating this type of risk and reason to those that traveled out west will be something to be considered as well. This book by Jorge Ramos tells an emotional tale of one of the most horrific incidences of undocumented people trying to cross over into the United States. On May 13, 2003, over 50 people piled into a refrigerated trunk hoping to arrive to their destination – the United States. Jorge Ramos recounts their stories from interviews with some of the survivors. Over the course of the next few hours of their journey in which the refrigeration is never turned on, people begin to asphyxiate and die. In total, 19 died as they were trying to cross over. The book details the “business” of crossing the border giving students an opportunity to see the functionalist perspective in action.

Manifest Destiny (Conflict Perspective Application)

Manifest Destiny is representative of the Conflict sociological perspective. It demonstrates the thought process and actions of a group of people indicating the divine right of being able to expand their borders to include the entire North American continent. In doing so, conflict occurs. Ken Burns’, *The West* documentary series, states in Episode Seven, *The Geography of Hope*, that the West is about the possibility of one

means the not of another.<sup>14</sup> We saw this on many occasions in our seminar. In our first session, Seminar Leader Joyce had us visualize “the” west, draw an individual map, and then identify what we thought was the west on a class map. Each Fellow thought a little bit differently and gave their reasoning behind their thoughts. Additionally, he showed us the John Gast’s popular painting of Manifest Destiny entitled *American Progress* (1872). Of course I have seen this each time I have studied American History. Yet, I have really rarely thought about it. Now looking at it, after attending seminar, I can tell a bit more about the story it holds including what is *not* pictured. I see covered wagons bringing families in groups on the long, arduous journey but I do not see the African Americans who searched for freedom. I see the railroads springing up to enable people to go West more easily but I do not see the Chinese who helped to construct them. They had come to this country for a better future yet denied just this after the construction was complete. I see the indigenous peoples rushing further west as well. In this painting they carry their things looking back in fear at the giant woman dressed in white. Thus, began my quest to find more information about this Manifest Destiny idea. Breaking down the words, Manifest means *obvious* and Destiny means *certain*. This “general notion” also meant “individualism, idealism, American Exceptionalism, romantic nationalism, White supremacism, and a belief in the inherent greatness of what was then called the ‘Anglo-Saxon race.’”<sup>15</sup> This source goes on to report that there was a “shared mindset that presumed the indigenous peoples to be primitive ‘others’ whose lifestyle and thinking required that they be socialized, segregated, or, if necessary, destroyed, while the Anglo-Saxons occupied the land and harnessed it to useful purposes such as agriculture.”<sup>16</sup> This rationale – our right – for taking the land from the indigenous population was because it seemed as if they were wasting the land by not using it for production (farming).

Four documents will be used with the students to have them examine the Manifest Destiny/westward movement. I want these documents (one and two) – the idea of manifest destiny; to convey the peoples’ belief that the acquisition of these lands was a divine right. However, it is important that they also understand that there was debate along the way of what land and who to include.

*The Great Nation of Futurity in the United States Democratic Review (1837 – 1859) John O’Sullivan*

America is destined for better deeds. It is our unparalleled glory that we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement.

Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage, where men were led on by hundreds of thousands to slay one another, dupes and victims to emperors, kings, nobles, demons in the human form called heroes. We have had patriots to defend our homes, our liberties, but no aspirants to crowns or thrones; nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led on by wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide, that a human being might be placed on a seat of supremacy.<sup>17</sup>

*America's Progress, John Gast (1872)*

George Crofutt 's description entailed,

“A precarious clad America floats westward thru the air with the “Star of Empire” on her forehead. She has left the cities of the East behind, and the wide Mississippi, and still her course is westward. In her right hand she carries a school book – testimonial of the national enlightenment, while with her left she trails the slender wires of the telegraph that will bind the nation. Fleeing her approach are Indians, buffalo, wild horses, bears, and other game, disappearing into the storm and waves of the Pacific Coast. They flee the wonderous vision – the ‘star’ is too much for them.”<sup>18</sup>

*The Significance of the Frontier in American History*

Frederick Jackson Turner essay which he presented at a special meeting of the American Historical Association helped to revolutionize thinking about the west.<sup>19</sup> On the Primary Sources Workshops in American History website questions are highlighted for the reader to focus on if one so chooses. The third question, What does Turner foreshadow about diversity and the character of the American identity?<sup>20</sup> is of particular importance to this section of our studies. Students will think about

*49. Opposing Views of Expansion into Mexico*

This piece is a debate between John Calhoun and John Dix in Congress (1848) as to whether Mexico should become part of the United States. After the Mexican War, ideas differed as to what should happen to Mexico and the people. The acquisition of this land could mean an area for slavery and/or mineral/land wealth. Although both Calhoun and

Dix use race as an argument, they still differ in their opinions. Calhoun states that Mexico should not be annexed as the U.S. government “never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race.”<sup>21</sup> Since Mexicans were not of the “white race” they should not be incorporated. Dix disagrees, saying that we should acquire the Mexican territory, looking to use this as a measure to secure peace in the area. He notes that it is inevitable that “our population is destined to spread itself across the American continent, filling up, with more or less completeness, according to attractions of soil and climate, the space that intervenes between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.”<sup>22</sup> He goes on to imply that the “aboriginal races” in those areas need to “give way before the advancing way of civilization”<sup>23</sup> by being put into contracted areas living as they have and ultimately, become extinct. He states that this process of ridding the people who represent “idleness, and ignorance, and barbarism, shall give place to industry, and knowledge, and civilization.”<sup>24</sup>

#### Border/Boundary (Symbolic Interactionist Perspective)

I thought about these words from a student perspective. How would they define the word border? Most likely they would look at the political or geographic boundaries or the lines that represent the boundaries. On a political map it would be to divide up parcels of land determining “who” owns “what” – the division lines of a country, state, or county. Joyce’s questions to my initial unit idea included: What does it mean to create a border? To separate? Keep out? Keep in? to preserve? Same for frontier. Fences? Cultural borders? Sealed? Or permeable? Those are the questions that students might not ask at the beginning of the unit. Professor Richard Sennett gave a lecture at the University of Michigan describing the difference between the two terms as a boundary which establishes a closing off versus a border which allows for “selective” interaction between the two sides.<sup>25</sup> This selective interaction reminds me of Seminar Leader Joyce’s words when he spoke of the fence that extends into the Pacific Ocean, dividing Mexico and the United States. At one point in history, the fence did not reach far enough to separate the peoples during low tide. So, they came together for “picnics, parties, commerce, etc.”<sup>26</sup> This is also reminiscent of a photograph in the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies our textbook. Young men from both sides are playing volleyball using the fence as the net for their game. Sennett describes this comparison in more detail:

Boundaries are quite like cell walls: rigid and impermeable, while borders are akin to cell membranes: at once resistant and porous. Boundaries can be fixed and immovable (e.g. Israeli security walls, “protecting” Israeli civilians from their

West Bank counterparts); or defined by motion (e.g. traffic intensive super highways in Caracas, Venezuela separating the affluent subdivisions from the poor favelas, one race from other); or vertical (e.g. tall residential towers employing verticality as means of withdrawal from horizontal connections with the landscape in which they sit); and/or absolute (e.g. severely policed housing for the rich in Sao Paolo dramatizing the difference between poverty and wealth).

In contrast, borders are always active and changing. They are defined by rituals and social norms (e.g. Dharavi – at once blurring everyday distinctions between living and working, mixing complex activities and differentiating space, temporally); can be resistant to outsiders (e.g. parking lot in East London transformed by neighbourhood residents into a beach during day); are typically informal (e.g. open spaces in Johannesburg temporarily colonized by vendors and food sellers); very local (e.g. pavement schools in Bombay repurposing compound walls and transforming the space by giving it a new life) and in many instances, can double up as places of refuge for the disenfranchised (e.g. Avignon, S. France).<sup>27</sup>

Geographers have identified many types of boundaries claiming that they are determined by a variety of reasons such as latitude and longitude, natural features, cultural aspects, and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>28</sup> A geometric boundary is one in which a straight line divides two areas not having anything to do with culture or geography.<sup>29</sup> Those that are the result of some type of physical aspect of the land such as a river are known as physical-political or natural-political boundaries.<sup>30</sup> Another type of boundary is known as cultural-political in which differing cultural facts – religions, for example help to divide up areas. “Cultural breaks in the human landscape tend to shift over time, which is one reason why cultural-political boundaries often lead to conflict.”<sup>31</sup> Richard Hartshorne led the thought process on how boundaries can also be classified as origin-based. These are divided into four types: (1) antecedent – in existence before “present-day human landscape”, (2) subsequent – followed the developing cultural landscape, (3) superimposed – forcibly determined, and (4) relict – “ceased to function but whose imprints are still evident on the cultural landscape”.<sup>32</sup>

Historically, boundaries were used a means of protection. Walls were built around castles and territories to keep out enemies. Today, it is much the same in certain areas of the world. Although we may not say “enemies”, walls are still being built to keep others

out. Looking at the Mexico/United States border, a lot of funds are used to enhance and strengthen the security between the two sides. Fences are created to help to ensure that people will not be able to cross or at least not have an easy time at it. Debates rage over the rationale and reasons behind this fence. Boundaries help to provide a sense of sovereignty leading to nationalism; a sense of us and them to help divide the world land and water spaces. Internal boundaries are used for administrative or cultural reasons. Boundaries may also enclose some peoples – limiting their abilities to move freely between spaces. Since boundaries limit some people in one way or another they often lead to disputes. Geographers define four types: (1) Definitional which is based on the legal language of the agreement (2) Locational looks at the interpretation of the definition of the agreement (3) Operational which focuses on the “neighbors who differ over the way their boundary should function” and (4) Allocational whose focal point is over the resources in the area.<sup>33</sup>

“It is important to recognize that stability of boundaries often has more to do with local historical and geographical circumstances than with the physical character of the boundary itself.”<sup>34</sup> Case in point would be the article that I plan to use with this section about the Mexico/United States Border entitled, *The Texans who live on the ‘Mexican side’ of the border fence: ‘Technically, we’re in the United States’*. It explains about the families living “behind” the United States’ government fence. Although these families are Americans and are living in the United States, the fence construction has put them literally on the “other side” of the border.<sup>35</sup> This story demonstrates how circumstances have affected the boundary.

Mexico has referred to the fences constructed on the Mexico/United States border as the Wall of Shame. In the United States these fences are known as Operation Gatekeeper (California), Operation Hold-the-Line (Texas), and Operation Safeguard (Arizona). These names differ in their meanings. What does the border mean? The separation of a culture? Yet, despite this means of protection or separation depending on how one looks at it – the border – there is a cultural exchange. People may move freely between that line. The people along that line share common language, foods, music, and symbols. Despite a fence, despite the separation, people share. The following two essays from James S. Griffith’s book, *A Shared Space*, will help students to focus on what is shared not separated.

*Respect and Continuity: The Arts of Death in a Border Community*

This essay describes the cemeteries in Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora – border towns. There are distinct differences between the two cities’ cultural customs

surrounding burying and honoring their dead. It further describes the hybrid that is occurring in these towns regarding their practices which is different than either of the countries norms.

### *Cascarones: A Florescent Folk Art Form in Southern Arizona*

These Mexican party favors, empty egg shells filled with confetti, which are used to help people celebrate by breaking them on each other's heads!<sup>36</sup> These works of art have crossed over to be appreciated by the "dominant society".<sup>37</sup>

## **Objectives**

Our state's recommended curriculum units are created following the Understanding by Design model based on research and theory by Grant and Wiggins.<sup>38</sup> The overarching idea is to teach for understanding beginning from the end, focusing on what you want students to know. Enduring Understandings are the big ideas of the unit and are vital to students' comprehension of content and concepts. They have lasting value and help to make the content meaningful. The following Enduring Understandings are taken from the Core Concepts of our textbook's chapter on Sociological Perspectives. By the end of the unit, students will know that sociological theories offer a set of guiding questions and key concepts that address how societies operate and how people relate to one another. They will be able to distinguish between the three sociological perspectives foci: functionalists = how the "parts" of society contribute in expected and unexpected ways to social order and stability and to social disorder and instability; conflict perspective = conflict over scarce and valued resources and the strategies dominant groups use to create and protect social arrangements that give them an advantage over subordinate groups, and symbolic interactionists = social interaction and related concepts of self-awareness/reflexive thinking, symbols, and negotiated order. Additionally, they will be able to define a border, explain the causes and consequences of borders, and describe how the United States and Mexican border has changed over time and how those changes have impacted the countries, their societies, and their peoples. Lastly, students will recognize that stories represent the humanness of all peoples.

## **Strategies**

Students come into our Distance Learning Laboratory with varying skills – technological, conversational, writing, and reading. All of these skills are essential to their academic success – in our classroom and beyond. I need to employ teaching strategies that work towards strengthening these skills throughout the school year. One can talk with a number of my school colleagues to know that while my conversational, reading, and writing skills were strong I still needed to improve upon my technological skills! Immersing myself in this Distance Laboratory helped me to improve upon these skills. I

searched out multiple opportunities to learn from my colleagues, call in district personnel, and spent numerous hours working with different types of practices such as Video Chat or Google Docs. My ultimate goal is to ready these students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning that will be expected of them when they leave high school to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. This particular unit is the first one on our curricular map. Students must master the following strategies/ideas at the very beginning of our course to be successful throughout the year.

### Collaborative Learning/Groupwork

Students need to learn how to work together to accomplish goals – those set by the teacher and themselves. This is a basic requirement for many positions or jobs that they will hold in the future. Working together, relying on each other helps to build team-working skills. This strategy is somewhat challenging for us in that there are two groups of students at two different high schools. For the intense conversations that follow the readings of important concepts such as gender or race, a facilitator must be certain that there is a strong sense of camaraderie, trust, and willingness to work with and listen to others in the group. In collaborative learning, each group member is accountable to each other, dependent upon each other and contributes the established goals. Everyone has some strength to share.<sup>39</sup> Together, more is accomplished. Opportunities to learn about each other before and while working help to promote the camaraderie and cohesiveness necessary to work well together. Individual and group evaluations are necessary to monitor the group's work (product) and their progress in teamwork.

### Five-Step Homework Notes

Although I am unable to give credit to the person on the High School Psychology Server I belonged to, the gratitude I express now is not diminished in any way. This form of note-taking regarding the textbook readings has greatly improved students' understanding of the text. This format helps to develop content area vocabulary knowledge and prepares students for class lectures and discussions, as well as assists them in studying for examples. The notes will help students to define the vocabulary terms, make connections/questions about the terms, and summarize the information. This helps to ensure that students will be able to identify, define, and apply all of the sociological terms that may seem foreign to students.

### Google Docs

Technology is an essential part of classrooms today, especially at the university level. I see part of my role, obviously in this Distance Learning Laboratory with thousands of dollars of technological equipment, to use it with the students so that they become proficient in this new language of technology. Google Docs is one of the ways we have to provide students with a collaborative opportunity to participate in a joint writing process.

Students will work with their peers to complete a piece of writing in response to a film, summarizing the key points to a lecture or reading, amongst others. I tell students that this skill they are perfecting in the classroom today will be beneficial to them at the university level in which they can work with their classmates across campus in completing group assignments without even meeting once! As an instructor, you can create and assign a Google Doc to group members. Also, feedback can be easily given even while a student (or students) is working on an assignment. Additionally, it is easily monitored through the Revision History, so that an instructor can keep track of who has completed what. Furthermore, for my teaching situation it helps to build partnerships between the students in two different schools.

### Blogs

Another technological feature used in this unit is the blog. A blog is an interactive site in which posts occur each day. Using a question or statement, I can preview what will be discussed and/or looked at that day or review or clarify something from the previous day's lesson. For an instructor and the students, this is an invaluable tool. For the instructor, it enables you to see what students understand and may have misconceived in addition to what they think. I like to have them write about the why of what they think, helping me to better understand their viewpoints. This also enables them to think before they speak as we use their blog posts as a means of conversation as well. For students, they are able to see their written conversations and leave multiple comments as well as questions for each other. This is a great pre- and post- activity in which the same question or statement is added to at the end of the day's lesson helping all parties to see individual and group progress in regard to comprehending a point or concept.

### Socratic Seminar

I have noticed that my students tend to talk before thinking and are more interested in hearing themselves than their fellow classmates. Being able to critically think about a text before discussing it and listening to others are important skills necessary for academic success and life-long ability to better understand another person's viewpoint. The weight of the conversation is left to the participants – in this case the students. They must critically look at and read the texts before coming to class and be prepared with questions and comments they would like to focus on. This is vital to the conversation's success. I want them to experience what it is to be in college in a small seminar-type atmosphere. Additionally, I believe if they are made responsible for this it will help them to better comprehend the content of the text which they are expected to master and be able to do well on the exams mandated by the local community college will lead to the grade that will determine if they receive college credit or not.

### **Classroom Activities**

Lesson One – Sociological Perspective/ Functionalist “*Who benefits from a particular social pattern or arrangement, and at whose expense?*”

Anticipatory Set: In the class Blog, have students brainstorm what they know about immigration (big picture/world). Then, have students share their answers with a partner. Directed Instruction: Explain the Functionalist Sociological Perspective highlighting the meanings of order, disorder, stability, and instability within the perspective. Break down the textbook’s vocabulary (manifest and latent functions and manifest and latent dysfunctions) for the students. Then, have them read the textbook’s section to determine their own understanding and application abilities. To further their understanding, they will read Dr. Mark Miller’s 2008 address at the International Organization of Migration. His piece, *Migration Development: Past, Present, and Future* will allow for students to extract the functions and dysfunctions of migration development.

Activity: Students will view the film, *El Norte* as well as read excerpts from the book, *Dying to Cross*. This may be one of the first foreign films to which students may have been exposed. A film guide will be provided to have students record the “functions” of the immigration process of Enrique and Rosa. The same type of guide will be used for their *Dying to Cross* readings. These two texts demonstrate to students the functions/dysfunctions of immigration.

Assessment: Film and reading guides.

## **Classroom Activities**

Lesson Two – Sociological Perspective/ Conflict *How do the parts of society contribute to social order/disorder and stability/instability?*

Anticipatory Set: Have students view John Gast’s popular painting of Manifest Destiny entitled *American Progress* (1872). This should not be new to them. In one sentence have them write down what they know about the meaning of this painting. Have students look for examples of what they would consider order, disorder, stability, and instability within the painting. Have them explain their reasoning behind these examples.

Directed Instruction: Explain about the Conflict Sociological Perspective highlighting the meanings of order, disorder, stability, and instability within the perspective. Break down the textbook’s vocabulary (*means of production, bourgeoisie, proletariat, and façade of legitimacy*) for the students. Then, have them read the textbook’s section to determine their own understanding and application abilities.

Activity: After briefly introducing the three texts (*The Significance of the Frontier in American History, The Great Nation of Futurity in the United States Democratic Review (1837 – 1859) John O’Sullivan, and 49. Opposing Views of Expansion into Mexico/John Calhoun and Jon Dix: Congressional Debate over Incorporating Mexico*), have students

work in pairs to read, discuss, and interpret the texts. Students will use a graphic organizer (Multiple Texts, Multiple Perspectives) to collect their data about the texts. Assessment: In their Ticket Out, students will demonstrate their understanding of the Conflict Sociological Perspective – define it and apply it to the texts read.

### **Classroom Activities**

Lesson Three – Sociological Perspective/Symbolic Interactionist “*How do involved parties experience, interpret, influence, and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting?*”

Anticipatory Set: Have students reflect on what they think the word border means. They will discuss the following questions with their group members: What is a border? How can we define it? What is the purpose of a border?

Directed Instruction: Explain about the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective highlighting the meaning of symbols, reflexive thinking, and prior knowledge. Have students read the textbook section regarding this perspective to determine their own understanding and application abilities.

Activity: After briefly describing each of the texts: *The Texans Who Live on the ‘Mexican Side’ of the Border Fence*, *Respect and Continuity: The Arts of Death in a Border Community*, and *Cascarones: A florescent Folk Art From in Southern Arizona*, have students read them in pairs to discuss and interpret them. Finding meaning using the “symbols” of these texts will be the challenge for the students.

Assessment: Students will list the symbols they discover in the texts. They will choose one of these and write a brief explanation as to how it demonstrates the meaning of the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective using the essential question.

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## **Appendices**

### Appendix A

College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives that I follow are to *identify the three major theories and compare and contrast each perspective.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9, students are to integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

As this is a college course on the high school campus, I follow the required Performance Objective but I also want to incorporate Common Core. For students, this is important so that they can see that these requirements are consistent in all of their studies.

Curriculum Unit  
Title

*La Frontera: An Application of the Theoretical Perspectives  
of Sociology*

Author

Barbara Prillaman

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

There are three major theoretical approaches to sociology: Functionalist, Conflict, and Symbolic Interactionist. These approaches/perspectives can be applied to real-world situations to explain the “why”.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

What are the three major theoretical approaches to sociology?  
How can one compare and contrast each of the perspectives?  
What is a border?  
What are the causes and consequences of borders including the opportunities and barriers for those who encounter them?

**CONCEPT A**

**CONCEPT B**

**CONCEPT C**

Functionalist Perspective/Immigration and Migration

Conflict Perspective/Manifest Destiny

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective/The Border

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

How do the parts of society contribute to social order/disorder and stability/instability?

Who benefits from a particular social pattern or arrangement, and at whose expense?

How do involved parties experience, interpret, influence, and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting?

**VOCABULARY A**

**VOCABULARY B**

**VOCABULARY C**

Mechanical Solidarity  
Organic Solidarity  
Manifest/Latent Functions  
Dysfunctions  
Manifest Dysfunctions

Proletariat  
Bourgeoisie  
Dominant Group  
Façade of Legitimacy

Symbols  
Reflexive Thinking

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

**Functionalist:** El Norte Film, Guatemala In the Shadow of the Raid (Frontline video clip), and Dying to Cross book

**Conflict:** American Progress painting, The Great Nation of Futurity in the United States Democratic Review, The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and 49. Opposing Views of Expansion into Mexico

**Symbolic Interactionist:** The Texans Who Live on the ‘Mexican Side’ of the Border Fence, Respect and Continuity: The Arts of Death in a Border Community, and Cascarones: A florescent Folk Art From in Southern Arizona

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- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/border> (accessed November 10, 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> Joan Ferrante, 28.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>4</sup> Joan Ferrante, 28.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>6</sup> [http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/Three-Major-Perspectives-in-Sociology.topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26837.html](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/Three-Major-Perspectives-in-Sociology.topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26837.html) (accessed July 14, 2012).
- <sup>7</sup> Joan Ferrante, 29.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>10</sup> Joan Ferrante, 33.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 36.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 36.
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www.udel.edu/poscir/faculty/MMiller/MigrationDevelopmentPastPresentFuture.htm> (accessed November 5, 2012).
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- <sup>21</sup> 49. Opposing Views of Expansion into Mexico
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> <http://whospeaksandacts.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/boundaries-and-borders> (accessed November 10, 2012).
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<sup>30</sup> Human geography: Culture , Society, and Space 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. H.J. de Blij and Alexander B. Murphy  
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<sup>35</sup> *The Texans who live on the 'Mexican side' of the border fence: 'Technically, we're in the United States'. December 21, 2011* <http://maboulette.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/the-texans-who-live-on-the-mexican-side-of-the-border-fence-technically-were-in-the-united-states/>  
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<sup>36</sup> James S. Griffith, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 55.

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