“How America’s Source of Immigrants Has Changed Over a Century” Questions

1. How long is the border between the United States and Mexico?

2. *Critical Thinking*: Why do you think so many people want to leave Mexico to come to the United States? Explain.

3. From 1880 until 1919 what country sent the most immigrants to the United States?

4. *Critical Thinking*: What impact do you think German immigration had on the United States? Explain.

5. Since 1965 where have most immigrants to the United States come from?

6. *Critical Thinking*: Why would there be more many more immigrants in some states than others? Explain.

7. *Critical Thinking*: Why would immigrants from Canada be higher in northern states?

8. *Map Question*: What are two differences in the immigration map from 1910 to 2010?

9. *Map Question*: Based on the 2010 map make a prediction about how the current immigration trend will impact Kentucky. Explain your prediction.

From Germany to Mexico: How America’s source of immigrants has changed over a century

BY JENS MANUEL KROGSTAD AND MICHAEL KEEGAN5 COMMENTS

With more than 40 million immigrants, the United States is the top destination in the world for those moving from one country to another. Mexico, which shares a nearly 2,000-mile border with the U.S., is the source of the largest wave of immigration in history from a single country to the United States.

But today’s volume of immigrants, in some ways, is a return to America’s past. A century ago, the U.S. experienced another large wave of immigrants. Although smaller at 18.2 million, they hailed largely from Europe. Many Americans can trace their roots to that wave of migrants from 1890-1919, when Germany dominated as the country sending the most immigrants to many of the U.S. states, although the United Kingdom, Canada and Italy were also strongly represented.

In 1910, Germany was the top country of birth among U.S. immigrants, accounting for 18% of all immigrants (or 2.5 million) in the United States. Germans made up the biggest immigrant group in 17 states and the District of Columbia, while Mexico accounted for the most immigrants in just three states (Arizona, New Mexico and Texas). Behind Germany, the second-most number of immigrants in the U.S. were from Russia and the countries that would become the USSR (11%, or 1.6 million).

Since 1965, when Congress passed legislation to open the nation’s borders, immigrants have largely hailed from Latin America and Asia. In states that have attracted many immigrants, the current share of immigrants is below peaks reached more than a century ago. Today there are four states (California, New York, New Jersey and Florida) in which about one-in-five or more people are foreign born. California peaked in 1860 at 39.7%, when China was the top country of birth among immigrants there. Meanwhile, New York and New Jersey peaked in 1910 at 30.1% (Russia and the USSR) and 26.2% (Italy), respectively.

Today, five times as many immigrants in the U.S. are from Mexico than China, the country with the second-highest number of immigrants (5% of all immigrants in the U.S., or 2.2 million). Mexico is the birthplace of 29% (or 11.7 million) of all immigrants in the United States. Immigrants born in Mexico account for more than half of all of the foreign born in four states: New Mexico (72.4%), Arizona (60.2%), Texas (59.7%) and Idaho (53.5%).

Despite Mexico’s large numbers, immigrants come to the U.S. from all over the world. India is the top country of birth among immigrants in New Jersey, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, even though only about one-in-ten immigrants in each state are from India. Canada is the top country of birth for immigrants in Maine (27%), New Hampshire (14%), Vermont (23%), North Dakota (19%) and Montana (25%). Filipinos account for a large share of immigrants in Hawaii (45%) and Alaska (30%).

