

# Theoretical Perspectives and Methods of Social Research

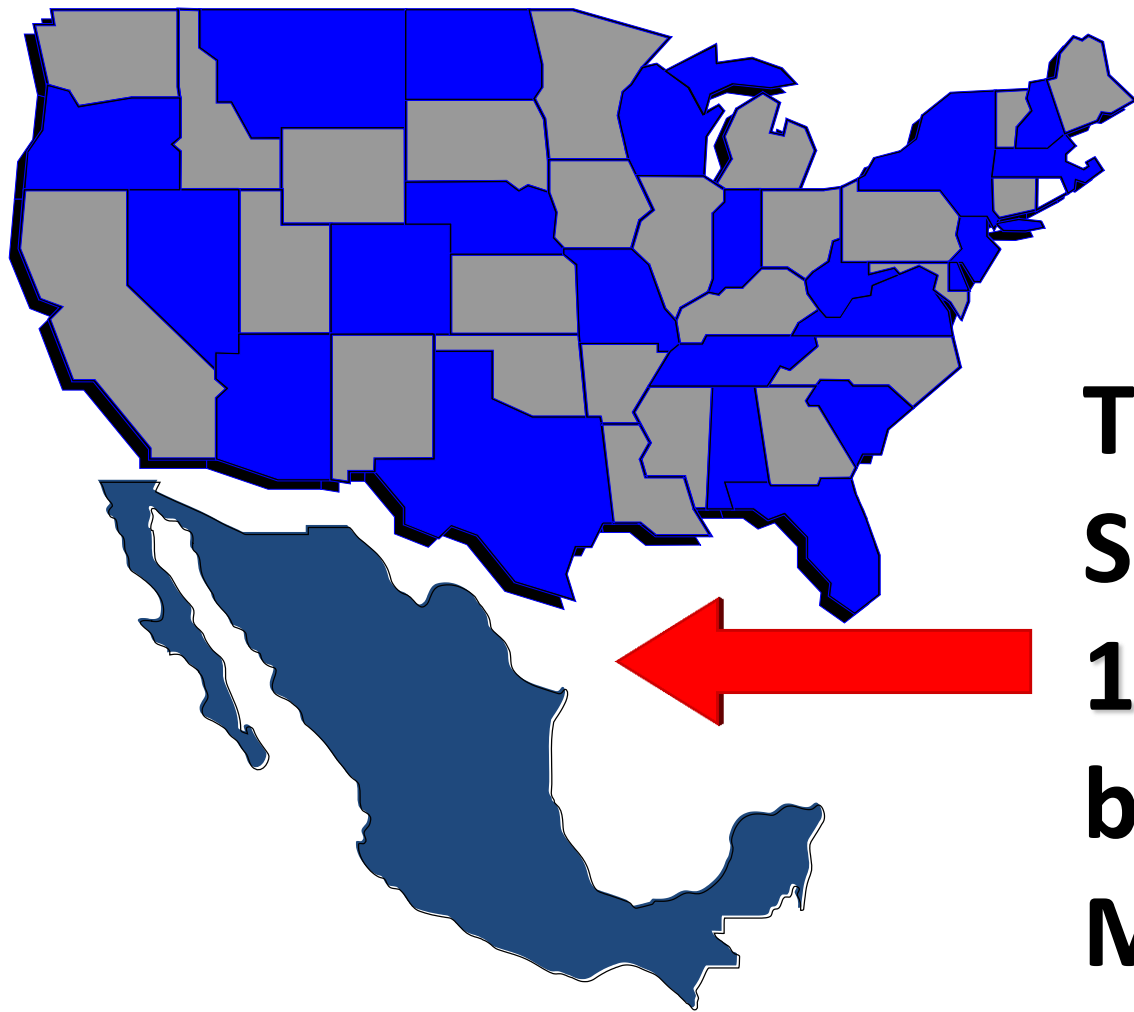
Mexico

2

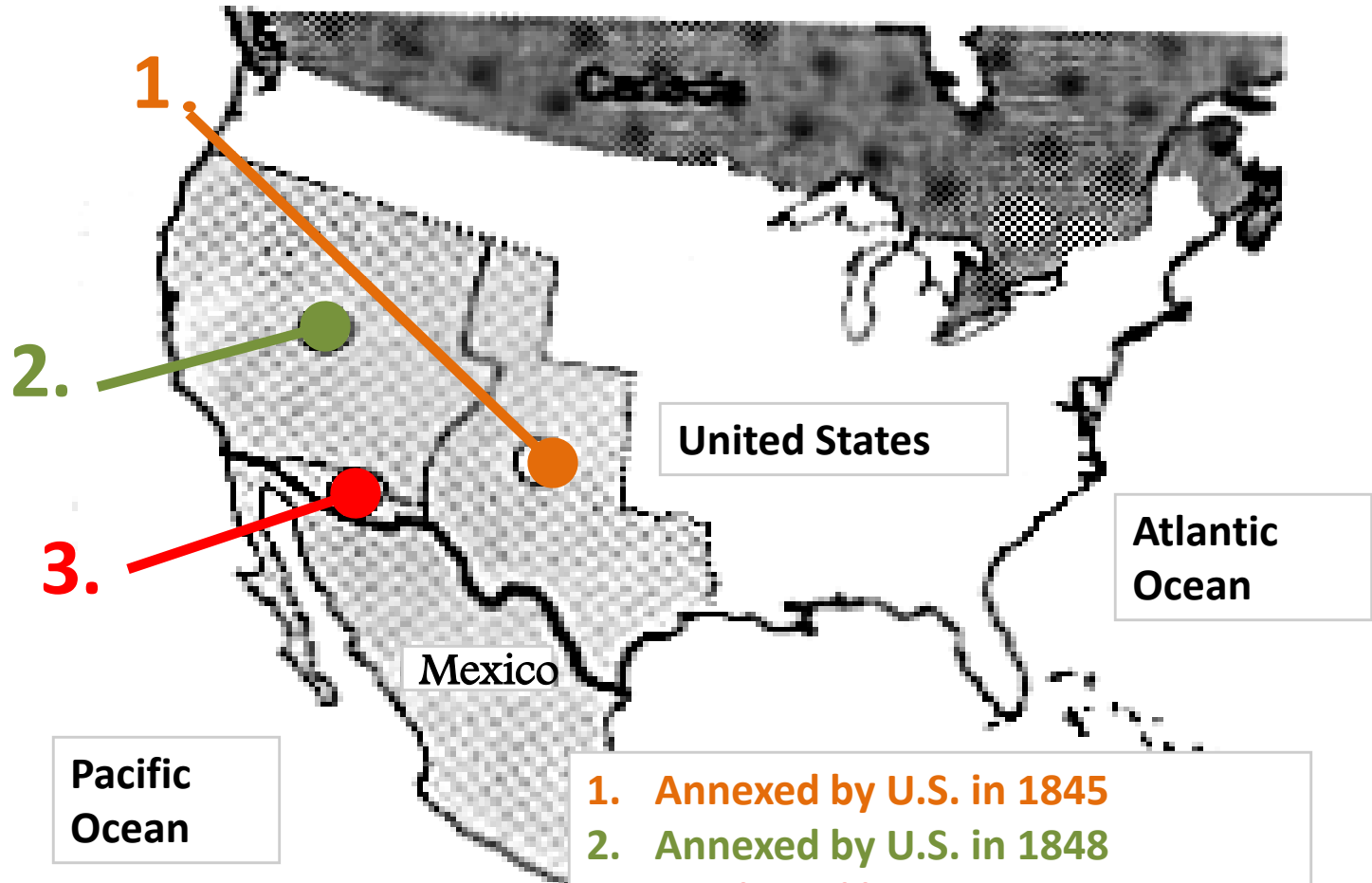




**Why Focus on Mexico?**



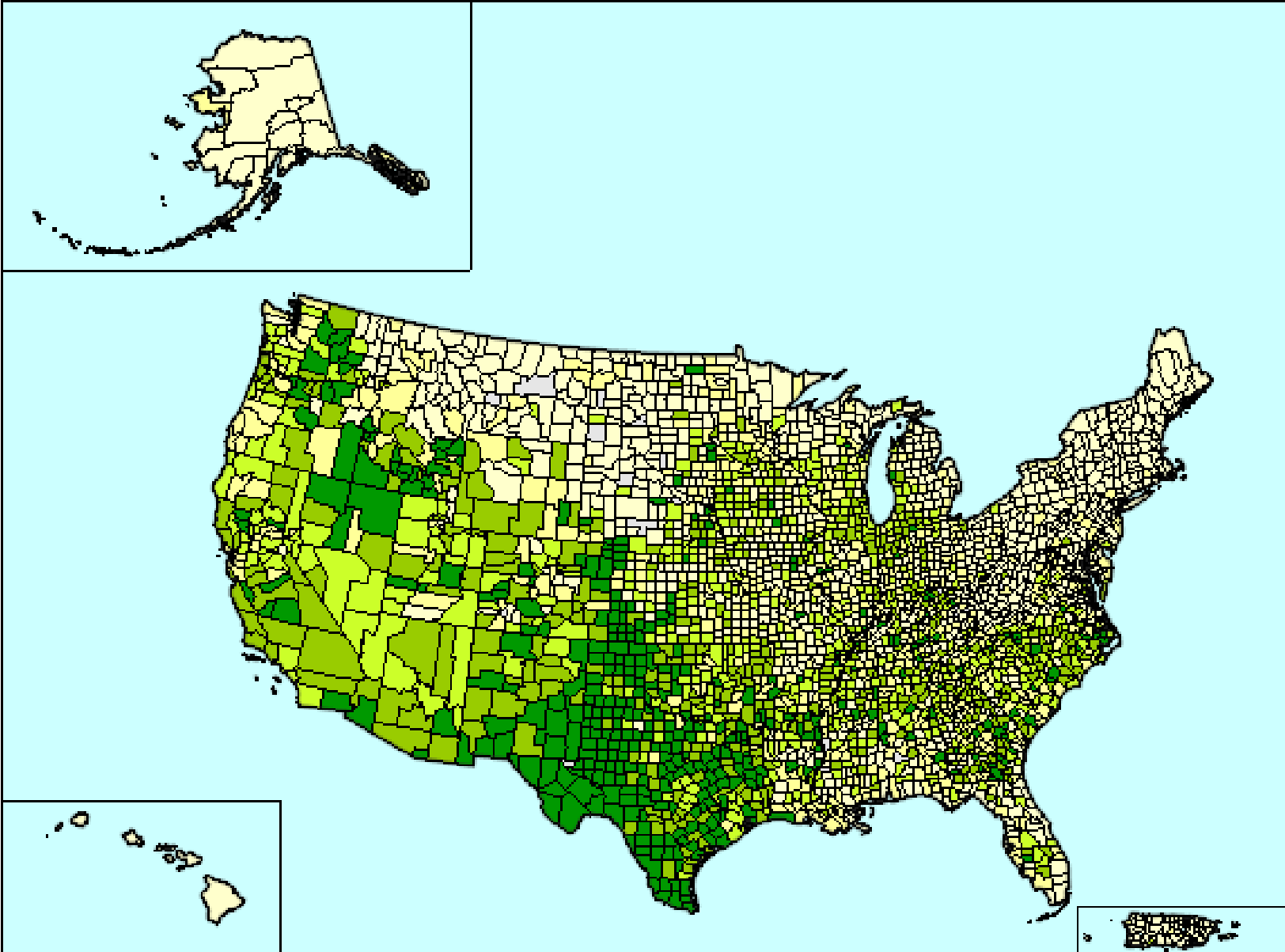
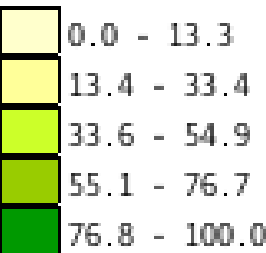
**The United States shares a 1,952-mile border with Mexico.**



- 1. Annexed by U.S. in 1845
- 2. Annexed by U.S. in 1848
- 3. Purchased by U.S. in 1853

**Data Classes**

Percent



Percent of People Born in Mexico by U.S. County

The border was created by force, and how to guard it and control it has always been a preoccupation for the U.S. government.



## Images of the Border and Border Barriers/Fences

The next several slides depict images of the U.S./Mexico border.

Use your sociological imagination to describe the images you're seeing and how border barriers might impact both the U.S. and Mexico.



MEXICO

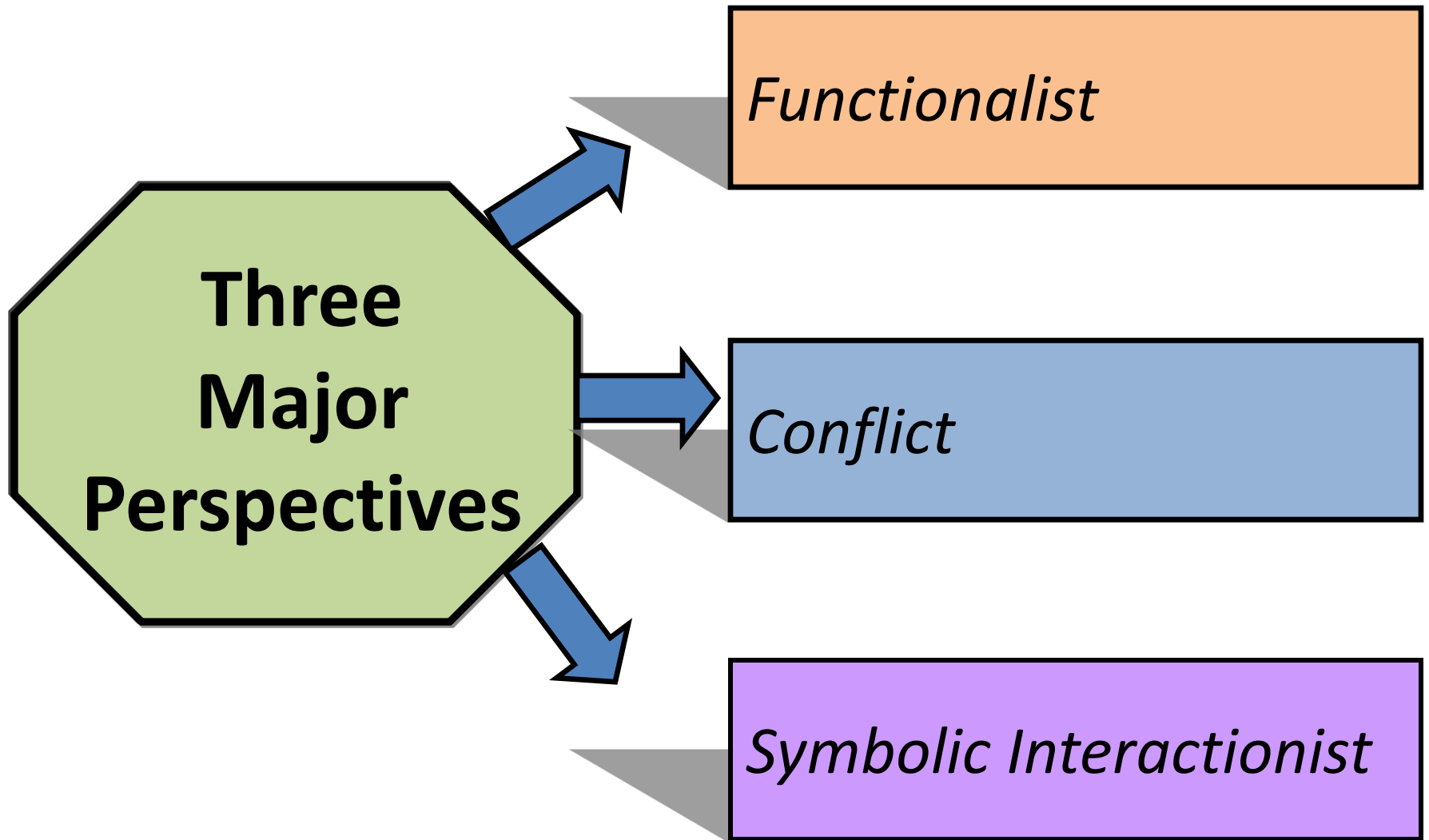
U.S.











# Each perspective offers:

- A central question to guide thinking about a particular event
- A vocabulary for answering that question

# Functionalist Theory: An Overview

## Focus

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Order and stability

## Vision of Society

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System of interrelated parts

## Key Terms

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**Function**, dysfunction, manifest, and latent

## Central Question

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Why does a part exist?  
What are the anticipated and unintended consequences of a part?

## Key Criticism

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Defends existing social arrangements  
Leaves one wondering about a part's overall effect on society



Robert K  
Merton

# Function

# Dysfunction

## Manifest

**Anticipated**  
consequences  
that support  
existing order

**Anticipated**  
disruptive  
consequences to  
existing order

## Latent

**Unanticipated**  
consequences that  
support existing  
order

**Unanticipated**  
disruptive  
consequences to  
existing order

## Functionalists ask...

How do the U.S./Mexico border barriers contribute to order and stability?

What are the intended and unintended consequences of the U.S./Mexico border barriers?

# Function

# Dysfunction

## Manifest

A decrease in the number of undocumented immigrants reported crossing into the U.S.

Increased numbers of undocumented immigrants paying smugglers to guide them into the U.S.

## Latent

A border barrier that doubles as a volleyball net allowing teams on each side to face off as part of festivals and other cross-border celebrations

Dramatic disruptions to grazing, hunting, watering and migration patterns. (e.g., if it doesn't fly, can't cross the border)

# Function

# Dysfunction

Manifest

An overall drop in the reported crime rate on the U.S. side of the border from 30% to 12%

Increased fatalities as undocumented immigrants now risk their lives to enter the United States through the desert and other inhospitable terrain.

Latent

Cooperation between Mexican and U.S. in launching the Border Safety Initiative Program

Some barrier construction sites were not subjected to environmental impact review

# Conflict Theory: An Overview

## Focus

Conflict over scarce and valued resources

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## Vision of Society

Advantaged and disadvantaged groups in conflict over scarce and valued resources

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## Key Terms

Conflict, ideologies

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## Central Question

Who benefits from the way society is organized and at whose expense?

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## Major Criticisms

Simplistically portrays the advantaged as all powerful and disadvantaged as victims

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Conflict theorists focus on conflict over scarce and valued resources and the strategies dominant groups use to protect their own interests and access to those resources.



# Conflict Theory

Who benefits from the existence of the fence/wall/barrier and at whose expense?

# Conflict Theory

The barriers secure a border that separates a high-wage and low-wage economy.

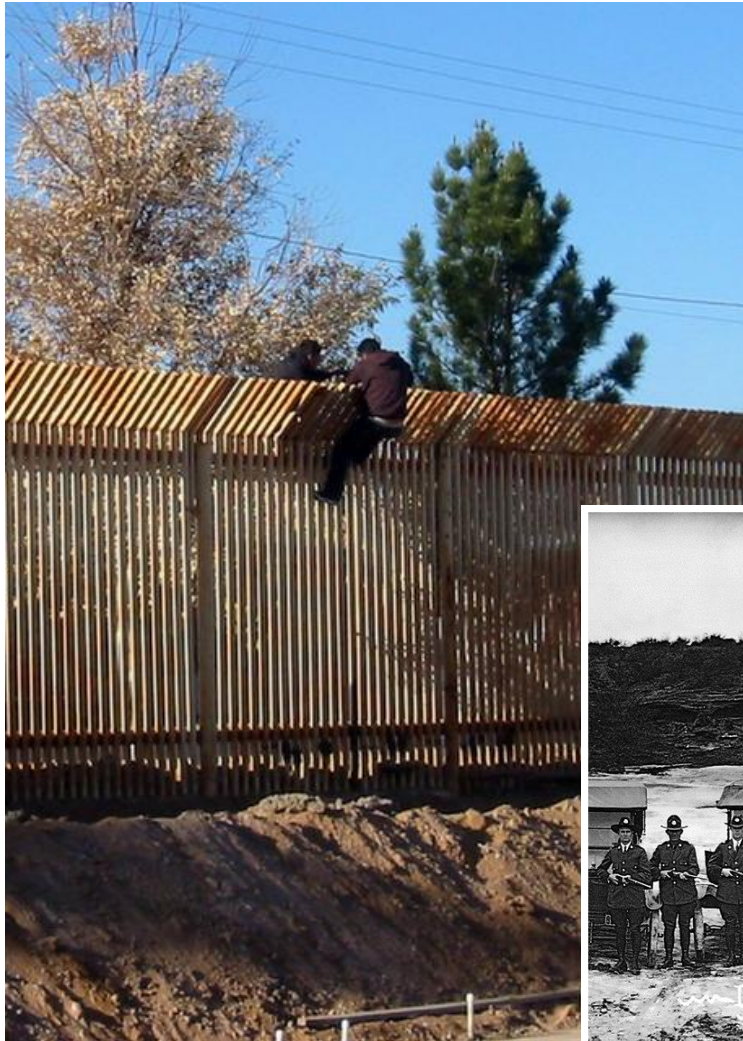
- A farm worker in Mexico could expect to make **\$3.60** in an eight-hour day
- U. S. counterpart made **\$66.32** in the same period



- a farm worker in Mexico could expect to make **\$3.60** in an eight-hour day,
- U. S. counterpart made **\$66.32** in the same period

From a conflict point of view...

The barriers are just one of many measures that the United States has put in place over time to control the flow of low-wage, undocumented labor from Mexico, but not eliminate it.

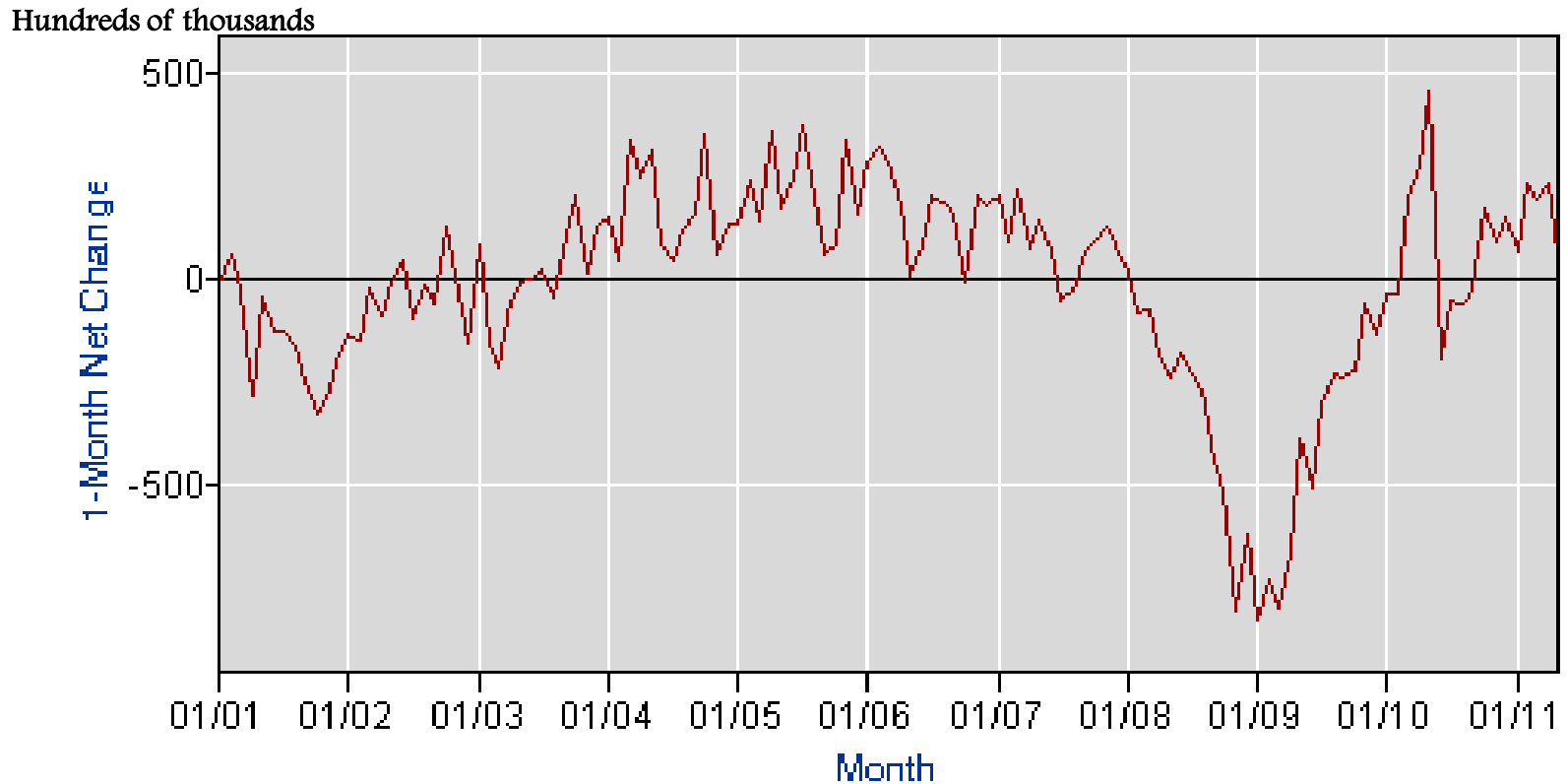




The barriers serve as a potent political symbol used to convey the illusion that United States is in control of its borders during a time of almost intolerable economic uncertainty.

A helicopter used for Operation Jump Start (OJS), the National Guard's mission to assist the Border Patrol in securing the U.S. border with Mexico

# Number of Jobs Gained and Lost By Month



The barriers send the message that something is being done to protect jobs.

For a visual representation of the border and its militarization, view the following videos:

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/multimedia/video/border\\_security\\_videos/](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/multimedia/video/border_security_videos/)

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/multimedia/video/border\\_security\\_videos/bp\\_videos/](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/multimedia/video/border_security_videos/bp_videos/)

Constructing barriers and militarizing the Southwestern border focuses everyone's attention on the border and sends the message that something is being done to protect the American worker.

The real forces threatening economic and national security—which are global in scale and difficult to control—are left largely unchallenged and unaddressed.

# Symbolic Interactionist Theory: An Overview

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<b>Focus</b>	Shared and evolving meanings; interaction
<b>Vision of Society</b>	Web of social interaction
<b>Key Terms</b>	Self-awareness; symbols, negotiated order
<b>Central Question</b>	How do people involved in interaction take account of what each other is doing or is about to do and respond accordingly?
<b>Major Criticisms</b>	No specific directions on how to frame and organize observations



# Symbolic Interactionist

How do people involved in interaction along the U.S./Mexico border take account of what each other is doing or is about to do and respond accordingly?

Symbolic interactionists study people as they engage in social interaction.

With regard to the border barrier, the following images would be of great interest to symbolic interactionists who would seek to immerse themselves in the border world.



BUREAU OF  
CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

ONE TEAM - ONE FIGHT!

MON - FRI  
CARPOOLS  
5 AM - 10 PM  
3 OR MORE  
↓

MON - FRI  
CARPOOLS  
5 AM - 10 PM  
3 OR MORE  
↓

MON - FRI  
CARPOOLS  
5 AM - 10 PM  
3 OR MORE  
↓

17

16

15

14

13

12

11

10





# Methods of Social Research

- Research – a data-gathering and data-explaining enterprise governed by strict rules
- Research Methods ~ the various techniques that sociologists and other investigators use to formulate or answer meaningful research questions and to collect, analyze, and interpret data in ways that allow other researchers to check the results.
- The scientific method is an approach to data collection that relies on two assumptions.

# Methods of Social Research

- The scientific method is an approach to data collection that relies on two assumptions.
  - Knowledge about the world
  - The truth of that knowledge is confirmed by verification – that is, by others making the same observations.
- Research should be carefully planned
  - Defining the Topic for Investigation
  - Reviewing the literature
  - Identifying and Defining Core Concepts
  - Choosing a Research Design and Data-Gathering Strategies

## Methods of Social Research

- Choosing a Research Design and Data-Gathering Strategies
  - Researchers decide on a research design—a plan for gathering data on the topic they have chosen.
    - Researchers study individuals but may also decide to study traces, documents, territories, households, or small groups,.
  - Researchers study samples—portions of the cases from a larger population.



## Methods of Social Research

- Researchers study samples—portions of the cases from a larger population.
  - Random sample: A type of sample in which every case in the population has an equal chance of being selected.
  - Representative sample: A type of sample in which those selected for study have the same distribution of characteristics as the population from which it is selected.
  - Sampling frame: A complete list of every case in a population.

# Methods of Social Research

## Methods of Data Collection:

- Research design must include a plan for collecting information
  - Self-Administered Questionnaire ~ a set of questions given to respondents who read the instructions and fill in the answers themselves. This is the most common method of data collection.
  - Interviews ~ personal, face-to-face, or telephone conversations between an interviewer and a respondent, where the interviewer asks questions and records the respondent's answers

# Methods of Social Research

## Methods of Data Collection:

- Interviews ~ personal, face-to-face, or telephone conversations between an interviewer and a respondent, where the interviewer asks questions and records the respondent's answers
  - Structured interview ~ the wording and sequence of questions are set in advance and cannot be altered during the interview
  - Unstructured interview – question and answer sequence is spontaneous and resembles a normal conversation in that the questions are not worded in advance and are not asked in a set order

# Methods of Social Research

## Methods of Data Collection:

- Interviews ~ personal, face-to-face, or telephone conversations between an interviewer and a respondent, where the interviewer asks questions and records the respondent's answers
- Observation ~ watching, listening to, and recording behavior and conversations as they happen. Success results from identifying what is worth observing.
- Hawthorne effect: A phenomenon in which research subjects alter their behavior when they learn they are being observed.

# Methods of Social Research

## Methods of Data Collection:

- Secondary Sources (Archival Data) ~ data that have been collected by other researchers for some other purpose

# Methods of Social Research

## Identifying Variables and Specifying Hypotheses

- Variable ~ any characteristic that consists of more than one category
  - Dependent variable ~ behavior to be explained or predicted
  - Independent variable ~ variable that explains or predicts the dependent variable
- Hypothesis ~ A trial explanation put forward as the focus of research; it predicts how independent and dependent variables are related and how a dependent variable will change when an independent variable changes.

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- Hypothesis ~ A trial explanation put forward as the focus of research; it predicts how independent and dependent variables are related and how a dependent variable will change when an independent variable changes.
- Operational definitions ~ clear, precise definitions and instructions about how to observe and/or measure the variables under study.
- Reliability ~ the extent to which an operational definition gives consistent results



# Methods of Social Research

## Identifying Variables and Specifying Hypotheses

- Validity ~ the degree to which an operational definition measures what it claims to measure

## Reliability and Validity analyzing the data and drawing conclusions

- Researchers search for common themes, meaningful patterns, and links.
- Generalizability ~ extent to which the findings can be applied to the larger population from which the sample was drawn

# Methods of Social Research

## Proving Cause

- Researchers search for independent variables that significantly contribute to the explanation of the dependent variable. Three conditions must be met:
  - The independent variable must precede in time the dependent variable.
  - The two variables must be correlated.
  - Eliminate spurious correlations
    - Spurious correlation: A correlation that is coincidental or accidental because the independent and dependent variables are not actually related; rather, some third variable related to both of them makes it seem as though they are.