

Irish Immigration Resource Guide for Teachers

Immigration and the American Identity

HIST 7023

Teaching American History Program

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Massachusetts History Frameworks Connection

USI.28 Explain the emergence and impact of the textile industry in New England and industrial growth generally throughout antebellum America. (H, E)

- A. the technological improvements and inventions that contributed to industrial growth
- B. the causes and impact of the wave of immigration from Northern Europe to America in the 1840s and 1850s
- C. the rise of a business class of merchants and manufacturers
- D. the roles of women in New England textile factories

USI.32 Describe important religious trends that shaped antebellum America. (H)

- A. the increase in the number of Protestant denominations
- B. the Second Great Awakening
- C. the influence of these trends on the reaction of Protestants to the growth of Catholic immigration

KEY QUESTIONS:

- What were some of the main reasons and historical circumstances caused Irish people to immigrate to the United States? 18th Century? 19th Century? 20th Century?
- Did race play a role in the ability for Irish Americans to successfully assimilate into the US culture during the 19th century? Did discrimination, racism or prejudice effect these new immigrants/citizens? How?
- Because Irish immigrants were light skinned (white), did they have a more difficult or easy transition as accepted Citizens of the United States? Than Asians? Latinos? Blacks?
- What were the top five destinations for Irish people bound for the United States? Why?
- What types of jobs did Irish immigrants tend to hold between 1800 and 1860? Was this the same after the Civil War?
- Was Irish migration always a one way trip? Did Irish immigrants always come to the United States with the intention of settling permanently?
- Did the struggles of the Irish people make them strong individuals who were better prepared to endure life in the United States? What were the struggles? What hardships did they have to endure in the US?

POSSIBLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Lesson Plans from the University of Pennsylvania (See Annotated Websites)
- Students and Ancestry.com/ Case Study searches/ Their own genealogy projects
- Document Analysis (Using Hogan document from NARA or Tom Doyle Letters from Library of Congress)
- Take the Citizenship Quiz (see Annotated Websites)
- Create a Graph or Pie Chart comparing immigration statistics (Scholastic- See Annotated Websites)
- Interviews/ Create and Oral History (perhaps in conjunction with local historical society)

- Construct a timeline based on family history or the history of a particular ethnic group

- Compile an Annotated Bibliography requiring students to practice Chicago Style Citations while exploring a variety of good sources like:
 1. Book
 2. Journal Article
 3. Website
 4. Video
 5. Document
 6. Newspaper

Irish Migration to the United States Narrative Overview

For many, migration from one place to another has had reasons that “pushed” people to look for opportunities to leave and also “pulled” them to a particular destination. The English “Enclosure” movements in the 18th and 19th centuries, which pushed people off of their small farms and into cities, thus providing cheap labor for the industrial revolution, also caused some of those dispossessed to seek opportunities elsewhere. The promise of land ownership in the English colonies in North America and later the United States was thus a powerful incentive for European peasants and working classes to move there. The ownership of land was seen as evidence of progression beyond the working class.

Irish migration to North America was also heavily influenced by the historical subjugation of the Irish by the English which had gone on for centuries. Facing religious and economic discrimination, many sought the greener pastures of North America. Most Irish, not being landowners, had paid rent, either cash or in kind, to their English landlords in order to grow their crops. These rents were increased according to the landlord’s needs, often causing hardship for the tenants. The lure of land ownership and the promise of decreased social discrimination were powerful.

Upon arrival in the new world, many of the early Irish migrants settled in the back country as farmers. Many later migrants, driven out of Ireland by the potato famine of 1845, tended to settle in the large cities, mainly Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Many Irish migrants experienced discrimination in the United States both as Catholics and as Irish. In spite of historical differences between the poor in Ireland and their English “betters”, the Irish migrants in the United States soon learned that in order to “get ahead”, it was necessary to seek to identify with the ruling “English” classes rather than the working classes which were often darker skinned, indentured or enslaved. This was especially true in the South in spite of traditional anti-slavery feelings in Ireland.

Irish migration to the United States continued at a high rate even after the potato famine had subsided due mainly to economic conditions, continuing religious discrimination, evictions from farmland and the conflicts caused by these in Ireland. While these events provided the “push” toward migration, favorable reports to friends and family from Irish migrants in the United States provided the necessary “pull”.

Irish Immigration to the United States Timeline

Pre 1492: Ancient myths of Irish sailors and Saints arriving in the New World on their own journeys or aboard Viking ship.¹

1492-1607: Irish members of various explorations from Europe arrive in the New World including one member of Columbus' first crew.²

1607 to Mid 1700s: Irish Catholics arrive in British North America as freemen, indentured servants and sometimes slaves. Oliver Cromwell's campaign against the Irish in 1652 stimulates a large movement of Irish to America.³ Many "Scots-Irish" Protestants from Ulster arrive after their land, once provided to them in an effort to displace Catholics, is confiscated and enclosed by English Landlords during the Ulster-Plantation period.⁴

1772: Wave of Ulster-Irish Immigration, estimated around 30,000, spurred by higher rents and a decline in the vital linen trade.⁵

1775-1783: Some calculations state that between one third and one half of the Continental Army was made up of Irish born and those of Irish decent, including 26 generals, of which 15 were born in Ireland.⁶

1790: First census of the United States records 44,000 Irish-born residents and as many as one half million of Irish decent.⁷

1798: Major rebellion in Ireland against British rule ends in a defeat for the rebels and causes a wave of immigration to the United States.⁸

1815-1835: Irish labor vital to a boom in road and canal building in the United States.⁹

1820-1830: Roughly 50,000 Irish immigrants arrive during the decade.¹⁰

1830-1840: Nearly 240,000 of the 540,000 immigrants to the U.S during the decade arrive from Ireland.¹¹

1834: Nativist mob attacks and burns down an Ursuline Convent in Charlestown Massachusetts.¹²

¹ William D. Griffin, ed., *The Irish in America, 550-1973* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1973), 1.

² Griffin, *The Irish in America, 550-1973*, 1-2.

³ Griffin, 2-8.

⁴ Henry Jones Ford, *The Scotch-Irish in America* (Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1966.)

⁵ Griffin, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² *Ibid.*

1840-1850: Nearly 800,000 Irish immigrants arrive during the decade.¹³

1844: Anti-Catholic/Anti-Irish riots in Philadelphia. Thirty people are killed, 150 wounded and 200 families burned out of their homes.¹⁴

1845: A fungus attacks the potato crop in Ireland. The vast majority of the rural Irish population relies upon the potato as their sole sustenance as the majority of other crops and livestock are shipped to Britain. The “Potato Famine” will last until the early 1850s in varying degrees of severity. The years 1847 and 1848 are the worst. During this time period the Irish population drops from nearly 8 million to 3 million; over 1 million die of starvation and disease 1 million immigrate to Britain and nearly 2 million people immigrate to America.

While the “Potato Famine” was a major stimulus for immigration it is often considered just “a last straw” as Irish immigration was well under way prior to the famine and continued long after its effects had subsided due to “religious discrimination, exorbitant rents, industrial decline, evictions, and the conflict between landlords and the agrarian terrorist organizations.”¹⁵

1850-1860: Over 900,000 Irish immigrate to the United States during the decade.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Robert E. Kennedy Jr., *The Irish: Immigration, Marriage and Fertility* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 43.

¹⁶ Griffin, 17.

Annotated Bibliography

Griffin, William D. *A Portrait of The Irish in America*, New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1981.

This book portrays an excellent pictorial reflection of the Irish in America. It examines their life, their struggles living in tenement houses in the ghettos to their successes in politics and their cultural heritage rediscovered. This is an excellent book to use with its political cartoons, photographs of political figures, and types of occupations the Irish were employed in. It is really a pictorial history of the Irish, with their origin, hardship in Ireland and America, their successes and most of all, the legacy they left for future generations.

Students will be able to analyze the Irish in their sadness and greatness and be able to understand how the Irish endured. Groups of students may choose a series of photographs on different topics and create a written analysis for a visual presentation on the Irish culture.

Griffin, William D., ed., *The Irish in America, 550-1972, A Chronology and Fact Book*, Dobbs Ferry CN: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1973

This book is a chronology of Irish history. It includes a time line from 500 to 1972. Documents and letters from Irish immigrants and victims of political reprisals are an excellent source for students to use for researching the lives of the Irish in Ireland especially those who stood up against the English tyranny of the Irish. It contains a series of charts on the number of immigrants who came to America up to 1970. Student can chart these immigrants using these statistics as to the years when the quotas were high or low. They can compare them to what was going on in Ireland during that time.

Ignatiev, Noel, *How the Irish Became White*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

The concept of race as a defining characteristic of American culture is an ever present theme in this book. It is a story of the Irish before and after the Potato Famine from 1840 to the Civil War. It explores their struggle in a white Protestant world. It reflects on how the Irish and the Blacks have common struggles. They live side by side and share work places. Their major difference is economic competition. The Irish will work dangerous jobs, but the Black slave owners wouldn't put their property in danger. Politics enabled the Irish to raise their standards and become the dominant class. Assimilation into the community was an essential element for the Irish. Many Irish became policemen which empowered the Irish to defend their status as white.

Comparing and contrasting the Irish and the Blacks from their place of origin, journey to America, the struggles they endured, and their social status in America is an excellent link to the immigration of these two cultures.

Johnson, James E. *The Irish in America* (Lerner Publications Company, 1976).

This book explores the factors that caused the Irish to migrate to America. The issue of poverty, the toiling on rented land, high rents, and years of drought which led to a famine. English control over Ireland and religious injustice created a force that encouraged the Irish to migrate to America. The author reflects on their determination to succeed in America. It was instilled in every Irish immigrant. They achieved success as entertainers, in sports, and in politics. They worked in mines, on railroads and on canals. An in-depth analysis of these factors by the students will provide them with a venue to answer a very essential question. How important it was for the Irish to retain their identity and create a legacy for the future?

Kennedy, Robert E. Jr. *The Irish, Emigration, Marriage, Fertility*, Berkley CA: University of California Press, 1973.

The author analyzes the Irish population through its social history and demography. His goal was to examine the life of the Irish for its uniqueness compared to other people. He states that there are less people in Ireland than in 1841. He focuses his book on marriage, children, emigration and their choices of occupations. He relates them to the political, historical, economic and social conditions of the country. He engages in the push/pull factor as a source for emigration. Cultural and psychological traits are also part of the uniqueness of this culture. He compares the decline in population of single women in Ireland to changes in agrarian techniques.

Students can chart the various conditions with the events that were taking place in Ireland. This will help them visualize a culture from its social history and demographics. This book would be good for a sociology class.

Laxton, Edward *The Famine Ships, The Irish Exodus to America*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1971.

This book examines the immigration of the Irish on what were called Famine Ships. It uses statistics to analyze the Famine migration from 1846-1851. The ships that carried these forlorn immigrants to America originated at many ports in Ireland and from Liverpool, England. Lists of the passengers who migrated are also included. Photographs and drawings of the ships including some that didn't make it to their destination are examined. The dimensions of many the ships are also listed. The perilous journey for many of these people included; dangers from icebergs, fire on ships, storms and being in steerage for many weeks at sea. This book includes a family tree of Henry Ford and a diary of his family's journey to America.

Students may use this book as a tool for a journal writing assignment on Irish immigration with its wealth of information on the people, the ships on which they traveled,

their port of origin and destination, their perilous experiences, the food they ate, and the type of welcome they were given upon arrival at their destination.

McCaffrey, Lawrence J. *The Irish Diaspora in America*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1976.

Irish Diaspora in America explores the history of Ireland from its early times when England ruled it and other countries invaded its people down to the twentieth century. It examines the people's and their fate in America. Economic opportunities, political power, and education were areas to be addressed. It was part of their assimilation into American society. They were able to survive British colonialism. However, Catholicism, the mainstay of the Irish people had become indistinguishable from other religions in its values. Were the Irish losing their identity as they moved to the suburbs? This source allows students to trace these new immigrants to America during the 1870's to the 1922 and comment on their success as they rose from the ghettos to the suburbs.

Paulson, Timothy. *Irish Immigrants: Immigration in the United States*, Chicago: Facts on File, Inc., 2005.

This book explores the push/pull theory as a source for Irish Emigration. Economic opportunity was the stimulus for migrating to America. The factors of religious injustice, famine, and a need for freedom from tyranny added to the reasons for the migration of this culture of people. He reflects on the Potato Famine and the Penal Laws as the final straw for pushing the Irish to America. The author also reflects on the role of the Irish in the Revolutionary War as a source for helping America against the British.

This resource is very useful for students to analyze the push/pull theory. Students can create a chart explaining the elements that pushed the Irish to America and how the theory of pull created a more positive economic status for the Irish in America.

Annotated Websites

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/photo_album/photo_album.html

This website is an excellent gateway to thousands of digitized documents covering a wide array of historical topics. For specific use regarding Irish immigration, this particular page makes available a 10-page photo album, written and published in 1906 by Edward Steiner called On the Trail of the Immigrant. This collection of photos captures the immigrant experience from the ship to the city. One strong point is that it is actually created when these pictures were “modern”.

In addition, Digital History also has a feature called “Ethnic America” which clearly and succinctly places landmarks in immigration history onto a timeline that can be viewed in its totality, or broken down by immigrant groups. This serves as a great starting point for novice researchers.

www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=450

Created by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, this website has a wealth of immigration information, and is particularly strong in its coverage of Irish immigration. One particular feature offers two wonderful lesson plans that could easily be used in a high school classroom, or adapted for middle school. The first deals with the Curtis family documents and photos, primary accounts of the immigration experience and its effects on both the immigrant family/or person and the extended family and community they were leaving behind.

The second lesson plan is based on the lyrics of six Irish ballads. Each ballad addresses some of the unique problems faced by immigrants in both the work place, and in their new homes, including discrimination, urban crowding and dangerous work conditions. Electronic and printable versions of all of these documents can be easily accessed through this site.

www.victoriana.com/Irish/IrishPoliticalCartoons.htm

“The Stereotyping of the Irish Immigrant in 19th Century Periodicals” by Christina Haug

This website is quite simple, focusing on 13 different political cartoons that illustrate some of the prejudices that new Irish immigrants and enduring Irish immigrants faced as they began to merge into the US world of politics and economics. Taken from well known publications like Harper’s Weekly, these graphics use satire and humor (although the humor is certainly subjective, and probably not at all humorous to the Irish immigrants) to illustrate the pre-conceived notions of the Irish that could effectively limit their opportunities, both to work and to exercise the civic duties of an American citizen.

<http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/FAMINE/ILN/>

Views of the Famine

Compiled by Steve Taylor, this website accesses hundreds of historical newspaper articles and seventy-two engravings from British and Irish newspapers (spanning the years between 1845-51). This site is particularly interesting because it gives accounts of the backdrop to which Irish immigration peaked during the mid 19th century—The Great Potato Famine. There are many sites that offer information and summaries of this catastrophic event in Ireland as it related to Irish immigration, however, through news accounts, one can appreciate the gravity of the circumstance as it was experienced at the time, and thus, shed some light on the possible emotional and physical stresses which pushed people out of Ireland, and drew many to America.

www.ellisland.org

Ellis Island, NY

This is the actual website of Ellis Island, the first US land that many Irish immigrants would set foot upon. It has three particular features that would be useful to the classroom teacher. First, this website has an interactive timeline which not only presents specific data for individual ethnic groups, but also provides the student or teacher with the ability to compare immigration from different groups over time. Second, it offers a window into the personal stories of several 19th century immigrants who passed through Ellis Island, which can be listened to, one of which is the sage of an Irish woman's immigration experience. Finally, with the specific name of a passenger, the Ellis Island site can conduct a passenger search from its own arrival records. This feature could be used as part of a search activity, and these records are free and open to the public.

www.history.com

The History Channel

How would a student who was born and raised in the United States (or their teacher for that matter) do on a US Citizenship Quiz? Just one of the many interactive features on this site, the student mentioned previously can see how he or she would score by taking this quiz. The Citizenship Quiz is available in many formats; as a brief timed quiz taken from the actual test given today; the entire 96-question quiz with no time restrictions; in Spanish (would this not almost simulate the experience of an immigrant who does not speak English fluently?). As a classroom tool, this activity could compliment any unit on immigration by offering the immigrant perspective in a very real way.

In addition, there are several thought provoking videos that can be viewed from this website. For example, “Detained at Ellis Island” portrays the fear and vulnerability of new immigrants coming to the US through Ellis Island knowing they or another member of their family may not be admitted. The videos are brief but poignant.

www.tenement.org/tours.php

Guided virtual tours of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum

No gas for light and heat, no toilets that flush or are even inside, no running water? These are conditions that students may be able to relate to if considering a power outage they have experienced in their lifetime. By drawing upon their prior experience, and with the help of a virtual tour, students might really be able to empathize with the conditions that many Irish immigrants lived in.

One of the tours available through this website is called “Immigrant Soles: A Neighborhood Walking Tour,” and focuses on the Irish living conditions in New York’s lower east side (97 Orchard Street). Vivid descriptions and photographs of living conditions offer a uniquely Irish perspective on urban life. This provides the educator with the opportunity to use tangible, physical artifacts as a way to consider the immigrant experience.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/NR/exeres/73A25148-7A0D-49CA-B8EE>

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum

This website offers a case study into the Irish heritage of the Kennedy family, and their immigration to the United States. Most students will be familiar with this family, and might be able to identify with the importance of commemorating one’s family history. Included in this website is a slideshow of JFK’s trip “home” to Ireland in 1963, audio clips of JFK’s official statements to Irish officials during this visit and several zoomable images of Kennedy family artifacts. One such item of interest is the Fitzgerald Family Bible, the same bible used by RK and JFK as they were sworn into office. By directing students to this case study, the “American Dream”, or the idea of coming from poverty and reaching the highest success in the United States, is clearly illustrated, even if it is not the common experience of most.

<http://www.america.gov/st/peopleplace-english/2008/February/20>

February 13, 2008

This essay by Kevin Kenney, History Professor at Boston College, gives a simple and accessible summary of Irish immigration to the United States from 1820- Present. It is brief yet complete in its treatment of major causes of Irish immigration, urban settlement and socioeconomic conditions facing new Irish arrivals to the US.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/facts.htm>

Scholastic Co. Inc.

Perhaps this is one of the most FUN websites for exploring immigration at any educational level! This website offers the technology to help students of varying ages and academic ability to “do” history. It does this in two ways:

1. Have students create their own immigration graphs, maps and pie charts. Students may use the programs available here to make comparisons from their own data. For example, they might conduct their own survey about the ethnic heritage of their classmates, and then compare this information to the national statistics. They might compare the immigration of one particular group, in this case the Irish, across time (i.e. 1850 compared to 1950), considering explanations for their findings. The possibilities are endless.
2. Have students interview an immigrant, creating their own historical record by documenting a primary source. Individually or in small groups, students would be required to talk with someone who has an immigration experience (In theory, this could come in many forms). This could be a modern immigrant or the relative of/child of an immigrant. This website offers guidelines to creating this record. The local historical society might even be interested in collecting this work!

There are so many rich resources out there which explore the immigrant experience, and the Irish immigration experience, in detail. Some other valuable websites include:

- www.DoHistory.com (Diary of Martha Ballard)
- www.census.gov (Featuring 1930's census)
- www.irishsodabread.info (original Irish recipes with background info.)
- www.mainememory.net (search Irish immigrant)

Annotated Primary Sources

“Mr. Calvert has an objection to an Irishman...” Letter from John Muir, n.d.”

<http://www.hsp.org/files/muirletter.pdf>

A short business letter that reflects the nativist sentiment many Irish immigrants faced upon their arrival in the United States.

Margaret McCarthy to her family, September 22, 1850.

<http://www.emigrantletters.com/IE/output.asp?CategoryID=6578>

This letter is reproduced online on the EMILE (Early **E**migrant **L**etter **S**taories) web site which is a cooperative site that currently has letters from five countries’ archives including Ireland. Margaret McCarthy, a young Irish woman who came to the United States alone writes home to her family describing the many issues she feels her family needs to be aware of if they intend to migrate as she did. Margaret adds that she believes the United States is a fine place to come to as no one goes hungry but warns of the flooded labor market in the east and that to be successful her family should come with money in hand either from earned wages or from a Mr. Boylan (perhaps their landlord. Landlords often paid for their tenants’ migration; sometimes out of humanitarian reasons or for the reason of removing people from land the landlord could use with his own plan).

Letter from Mary Garvey to her Mother in Ireland, October 24, 1850

http://mss3.libraries.rutgers.edu/dlr/TMP/rutgers-lib_3434-DS2.pdf

This is a PDF image of the original letter, accompanied by a transcription that has been placed on line on the RUcore, or Rutgers University’s Rutgers Community Repository website. The letter is written by a young, female Irish emigrant that uses the opportunity to ask about those she left behind at home, and to try to entice her mother to enjoy her in what can only be described as a land of plenty as she lists the abundant, and cheap food that she has the pleasure to enjoy regularly.

SKIBBEREEN

“Skibbereen” is a traditional Irish song of unknown authorship written some time after the famine but exact date unknown. The song recounts the experience of many of the rural tenant farmers in Ireland during that period. It covers the loss of crops, eviction, the need, rather than the desire, to emigrate. The lyrics can be easily located at numerous internet sites. (Copy of lyrics in Appendix A)

"St. Patrick's Day, 1867...Rum, Blood, The Day We Celebrate"

<http://www.victoriana.com/Irish/mail6.htm>

Political Cartoon by *Harper’s Weekly’s* famous nativist illustrator Thomas Nast. The cartoon depicts a mob of ape-like Irish assaulting police officers on St. Patrick’s Day in 1867 and demonstrates a widely received perception of the Irish as being less than human, often drunk and violent.

“The Stereotyping of the Irish Immigrant in 19th Century Periodicals: 1889

Cartoon” <http://www.victoriana.com/Irish/mail7.htm>.

This political cartoon, though printed near the end of the 19th Century shows a continuation of ethnic stereotyping of the Irish as unable to assimilate like other immigrant groups into the great melting pot because of a pension for rowdiness and violence

Appendix A

SKIBBEREEN

O, Father dear, I oft times here, you speak of Erin's Isle,
Her lofty scenes, her valleys green, her mountains rude and wild
They say it tis a lovely place, wherein in a saint might dwell,
So why did you abandon it, the reason to me tell?

Oh son I loved my native land, with energy and pride
'Til a blight came over on my crops and my sheep and cattle died,
The rent and taxes were so high, I could not them redeem,
And that's the cruel reason why, I left old Skibbereen.

Oh, It's well I do remember, that bleak December day,
The landlord and the soldiers came, to drive us all away
They set my roof on fire, with their cursed English spleen
And that's another reason why, I left old Skibbereen.

Your mother too, God rest her soul, fell on the snowy ground,
She fainted in her anguish, seeing the desolation 'round.
She never rose, but passed away, from life to immortal dream,
She found a quiet grave, me boy, in dear old Skibbereen.

And you were only two years old, and feeble was your frame,
I could not leave you with your friends, you bore your father's name,
I wrapped you in my cota mor^{*}, in the dead of night unseen
I heaved a sigh, and said goodbye, to dear old Skibbereen

It's well I do remember the year of forty-eight
When we arose with Erin's boys to fight against our fate
I was hunted through the mountains as a traitor to the Queen
And that's another reason that I left Old Skibbereen

O' father dear, the day will come, when answer to the call
All Irish men of Freedom Stern, will rally one and all
Ill be the man to lead the band, beneath the flag of green
Loud and clear, well raise a cry , **REVENGE FOR SKIBBEREEN**

*Cota Mor: Irish Gaelic term for an overcoat