



Bexley Diversity in Bexley

Historical Context and Overview

Is the United States best described as a melting pot or a salad bowl? The answer to this question hinges largely on how immigrant groups have assimilated into the larger American society. Historically, many of the earliest immigrant groups settled in ethnic enclaves in urban centers, but their descendants tended to migrate in various directions and assimilate into American society. Whether one views the country as a melting pot or salad bowl, it is evident that the United States continues to be diverse land made up of thousands of diverse communities.

The diverse communities of Columbus and Bexley reflect these larger patterns of migration and assimilation in American history. Bexley began as an enclave for German Lutherans. Like many communities in the area, Bexley was initially a “closed” community that placed restrictions on who could live there through home deeds. Today, however, Bexley is a diverse community where many groups coexist in fellowship.

The Jewish community originally lived on the South side of Columbus. Many ethnic groups in Columbus eventually spread in all directions throughout the city, but the Jewish community mostly migrated eastward as a group, setting up business and synagogues. The first Jewish families moved to Bexley in 1920. In the post-World War II era, larger numbers of Jewish residents arrived in Bexley, along with Berwick and Eastmoor. Today, about 20-25 percent of Bexley’s population is Jewish.

Bexley’s Jewish community has faced the question of assimilation—how much to be a part of, and apart from, the larger community. The Jewish Community Center was initially formed because they were not allowed in other area country clubs. Over time, the center developed a large array of programs—including a theater group and the first integrated bowling alley. The center has become a source of unity for both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities of Bexley.

Standards Alignment

Ohio’s Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 3

Content Statement 8. Communities may include diverse cultural groups.

Grade 4

Content Statement 13. The population of the United States has changed over time, becoming more diverse (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious). Ohio’s population has become increasingly reflective of the cultural diversity of the United States.

Grade 8

Content Statement 17. Americans began to develop a common national identity among its diverse regional and cultural populations based on democratic ideals.

High School American History

Content Statement 12. Immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.

Learning Objectives

- Explain the concept of assimilation.
- Analyze patterns of settlement and assimilation of ethnic and cultural groups in the United States.
- Describe the patterns of movement that resulted in Bexley’s diversity.
- Cite examples of diversity in Bexley.
- Discuss how the issue of assimilation has shaped Bexley and the Jewish community there.

Discussion Questions

1. In what way was Bexley a “closed community” in its early decades? How was this policy enforced?
2. How did Jewish migration patterns within Columbus differ from other ethnic and cultural groups? What do you think accounts for the differences in these patterns of movement?
3. Bexley was initially a closed community, but today it is a diverse community where people of various cultures and faiths coexist peacefully. How did this change occur over time?
4. What is assimilation? How did Bexley and the Jewish community there deal with issues of assimilation? Why might assimilation be considered a two-edged sword?
5. What role has the Jewish Community Center played in uniting the diverse community of Bexley?
6. How do the patterns of migration and assimilation in Columbus and Bexley reflect broader national trends in American history?

Extension Activity

- Have students decide which metaphor—the melting pot or salad bowl—they believe best represents the diversity of United States and Columbus. Students can create a visual metaphor that shows their view of diversity in the United States today.

Additional Resources

- The American Jewish Experience in the 20th Century - <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm>
- History of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Columbus – <http://columbusjcc.org/about-us/jcc-history/>
- A Portrait of Jewish Columbus – <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/studies/details.cfm?StudyID=735>
- The Jewish Life in America – http://www.pbs.org/jewishamericans/jewish_life/index.html