New Americans
19th and Early 20th Century Immigration

Historical Context and Overview

Before Columbus was a city, some of the area's earliest migrants came to the Refugee Tract. This land was aside in 1801 by Congress to provide land compensation for residents of Nova Scotia who had supported the American Revolution.

Since the early 1800s, various groups of migrants and immigrants have made Columbus their home.

The first major wave of immigrants to the U.S. took place from the 1820s-1870s, with the arrival of about 7.5 million new residents. Most immigrants came from northern and western Europe. The Irish and Germans were the largest groups to arrive in Columbus during this period. The Irish settled largely in the present-day Short North neighborhoods, while the Germans lived mostly on the Southside and Bexley areas.

The rapid increase in immigration in the mid-1800s alarmed many Americans. Immigrants brought their own cultural practices and languages, and many were Roman Catholics. The American Party (Know-Nothings) emerged in the late 1840s as an anti-immigration and anti-Roman Catholic political party.

In the decades following the Civil War, a second wave of immigration occurred in the U.S., with the majority of arrivals coming from southern and eastern Europe. These "new immigrants" sought freedom and economic opportunity in the U.S. in the wake of political revolutions in Europe.

Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. beginning in the 1850s to work in gold mining and, later, railroad construction. With growing resentment over job competition, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. This law prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. It also made Chinese immigrants permanent aliens by excluding them from U.S. citizenship.

By the early 20th century, Columbus had a booming industrial economy. This led to increased migration of white southerners and the arrival of the first wave of Latino immigrants to Columbus.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 4
Content Statement 3. Various groups of people have lived in Ohio over time including prehistoric and historic American Indians, migrating settlers and immigrants. Interactions among these groups have resulted in both cooperation and conflict.

Grade 5
Content Statement 10. Describe the cultural diversity of the Western Hemisphere as evidenced by artistic expression, language, religion and food.

Grade 8
Content Statement 16. Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

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

Content Statement 17. Racial intolerance, anti-immigrant attitudes and the Red Scare contributed to social unrest after World War I.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the patterns of migration and immigration to Columbus in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

- Discuss the sources of conflict between native-born American citizens and newly-arrived immigrants.

- Explain the reactionary measures taken in response to increased immigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

- Analyze the factors that contributed to various waves of immigration to the U.S. and Columbus.

Discussion Questions

1. What groups were among the first migrants and immigrants to the Columbus area? Why did they come to Columbus?

2. How did the rise of the American Party reflect anti-immigrant attitudes in the 19th century? What factors contributed to these anti-immigrant sentiments?

3. What was the purpose of the Chinese Exclusion Act? What impact did it have on Chinese-Americans?

4. How did immigration patterns change in the United States in the years following the Civil War? What factors led immigrants from Eastern Europe to move to the U.S. in this period?

5. What led to the increasing numbers of white southern migrants and Latino immigrants to Columbus in the 20th century?

Extension Activities

- Take a trip through Columbus (physically, virtually, or by using local newspapers or advertisements) and identify the many influences of various immigrant groups still present today. This might be present in architecture, food, music, churches, neighborhoods, etc. Have students create a multimedia presentation to showcase these influences.

- View the Immigration Explorer interactive map: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/03/10/us/20090310-immigration-explorer.html?_r=0. Zoom in to Ohio and hover over the various counties. Have students use the timeline at the top to analyze how patterns of immigration changed over time.

Additional Resources

- Ohio History Central : Know-Nothing Party - http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Know-Nothing_Party

- A Timeline of Immigration to the U.S. - https://edu.hstry.co/timeline/a-history-of-immigration-in-the-usa

- Chinese Exclusion Act - https://ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=47