

Immigration and Nativism: German and Irish Immigrants

- ❖ During Polk administration the U.S. increased in land area by 50%
 - ❖ Texas, Oregon Territory, California & New Mexico Territories
- ❖ Population increased dramatically during the 1840s and 1850s
 - ❖ Due to European immigration
 - ❖ More immigrants in this time than entire pop. of U.S. in 1790
- ❖ Most immigrants supported the Democrats, rather than the Whigs
 - ❖ Immigrant vote helped Polk (expansionist) win the Presidency
 - ❖ Immigrants crowded into cities & factory towns looking for work
 - ❖ Competition with native-born workers
 - ❖ Expansion of national borders seen as a possible solution
- ❖ The first wave of 19th century immigration to America brought millions from northern and western Europe
 - ❖ Conditions in Europe provided a stimulus to leave
 - ❖ Motives include religious freedom and economic prosperity
 - ❖ America offered abundant job opportunities and cheap land
 - ❖ Early arrivals sent back optimistic reports about prosperity
- ❖ Steamship companies offered low Trans-Atlantic fares
 - ❖ Some were swindled or exhausted savings waiting for ships to leave
 - ❖ Voyages miserable, potentially deadly, and long (6+ weeks)
 - Steerage passengers
- ❖ Some disenchanted by what they found and left but most stayed
 - ❖ From 1845-54, 3 million arrived – largest # of immigrants as a proportion of the U.S. population (20 million) in U.S. history
- ❖ Germans began arriving in large numbers in the 1840s & 1850s
 - ❖ A diverse group (Bavarians, Saxons, etc.) coming for various reasons
 - ❖ To escape economic depression, political conditions, & to seek religious freedom
 - Religious groups incl. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews
 - ❖ To preserve their culture, Germans tended to settle in ethnic neighborhoods or in rural ethnic communities (Midwest)
 - Tended to settle in Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Missouri
 - ❖ Hated by nativists for clannishness but admired for work ethic
 - ❖ Germans served in large #s in Civil War (had military training)
- ❖ The Irish came in large numbers in the 1840s and 1850s as well
 - ❖ Motives: poverty, overcrowding, discontent w/ British rule

- Potato blight in 1840s & 50s causes deadly famine
- ❖ Tended to settle in eastern city ghettos (Boston, NYC, etc.)
- ❖ Some Protestant - most Catholic, from poorer classes
 - Usually entered the workforce near the bottom
 - Men - manual laborers (building railroads, canals, etc.)
 - Women - domestic servants or textile workers
- ❖ Irish voter groups became very influential – speeding assimilation
- ❖ Irish unskilled labor competed directly w/ poor free blacks
 - Stirred animosity toward blacks & hatred for abolitionists
- ❖ Irish skilled labor competed w/ native-born white workers
- ❖ Other immigrant groups:
 - ❖ Scandinavians also immigrated in significant #s
 - Primarily for economic reasons
 - Mostly as pioneer farmers in the Midwest
 - ❖ Chinese came to the West Coast
 - Largely employed in construction, especially railroads
 - Heavily discriminated against
 - ❖ Jews (mostly from Germany at this point)
- ❖ Nativists increasingly opposed immigrant groups who were not easily acculturated – sometimes violently clashed
 - ❖ Irish Catholics targeted – nativists feared a papal conspiracy to dominate America
 - In one case, a Catholic convent was burned by a Protestant mob
- ❖ Political organizations resisting immigration formed
 - ❖ One example – the “Know-Nothing” or American Party (1850s)
 - ❖ Relied on xenophobia (fear of foreigners) & temperance movement (Irish & Germans stereotyped as heavy drinkers)
 - ❖ Fmr. Prez Millard Fillmore ran again in 1856 as a K-N
 - American Party absorbed by the Republicans after 1856
 - ❖ As abolition became the key issue, anti-immigrant legislation became less important
 - ❖ Nativism still continued (s?) to exist, mostly on a local/state level
 - Nativists tended to vote Whig – rather than for one of the specifically nativist parties
 - Immigrants used the Democratic Party to gain political power