

FACES OF AMERICA

with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

**LESSON TITLE**

“A Cold Reception: Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in the United States”

GRADE LEVEL

Grades 7-9

TIME ALLOTMENT

Two 45-minute class periods

SUBJECT MATTER

Social Studies, American History

OVERVIEW

This media-enhanced lesson plan will use clips from Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s PBS series *FACES OF AMERICA* to explore the hostile reception immigrants have often received from anti-immigrant “nativists” in an America not always eager to accept them and the change they represent.

An Introductory Activity will introduce students to the larger historical patterns and forces of immigration throughout American history, as well as anti-immigrant sentiments manifested in contemporary America. In the Learning Activities, students will learn about the history of anti-immigrant sentiment directed towards Germans, Irish, Chinese, Japanese and other ethnicities from the mid 18th to early 20th century by analyzing images, music lyrics, and video segments from *FACES OF AMERICA*. As a Culminating Activity, students will write letters to hypothetical immigrants to America from the top ten immigrant-sending nations, in which they will both welcome the newcomers, warn them of the anti-immigration sentiment they may experience, and offer advice on how they might best avoid it.

This lesson is best used as an introduction to a unit on immigration, or as a stand-alone educational experience to enhance viewing of *FACES OF AMERICA*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Describe the major patterns and forces of immigration throughout American history;
- Analyze the origins and motivations of ethnic stereotyping of immigrants;

- Define major pieces of congressional legislation which affected immigration policy throughout American History;
- Detect parallels between the current immigration debate and the history of various anti-immigration movements throughout American history.

LEARNING STANDARDS

Standards available online at: http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/thinking5-12_toc.html

Historical Thinking Standards for Grades 5-12

Standard 1

The student thinks chronologically:

Therefore, the student is able to

- **Reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration** in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to **explain historical continuity and change**.

Standard 2

The student comprehends a variety of historical sources:

Therefore, the student is able to

- **Read historical narratives imaginatively**, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved--their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.
- **Appreciate historical perspectives**--the ability (a) describing the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts, and the like; (b) considering the historical context in which the event unfolded--the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place; and (c) avoiding "present-mindedness," judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.
- **Draw upon the visual, literary, and musical sources** including: (a) photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings; (b) novels, poetry, and plays; and, (c) folk, popular and classical music, to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon information presented in the historical narrative.

Standard 3

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore, the student is able to

- Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.
- Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries.

STANDARDS IN HISTORY FOR GRADES 5-12

Era 4, Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions

Era 6, Standard 2: Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity

Era 10, Standard 2: Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States

MEDIA COMPONENTS

Video

FACES OF AMERICA, selected segments

Clip 1: “A Colony of Aliens”

This segment reveals Ben Franklin’s objection to German immigrants in colonial Pennsylvania.

Clip 2: “Who’s White”

In this segment Queen Noor learns of her Syrian ancestors’ legal claim that for naturalization purposes they should be considered white rather than Asian.

Websites

“The Peopling of America”

http://www.ellisland.org/immexp/wseix_5_0.asp.

An interactive from the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation exploring immigration patterns and the forces behind them throughout American history.

“Anti-Irish Cartoons”

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/omalley/120/alien/two.html>.

An archive of captioned 19th century anti-Irish cartoons from the Center for History and New Media.

“Anti-Chinese Songs”

www.columbia.edu/itc/history/baker/w3630/edit/chinpoem.html

Annotated transcriptions from Columbia University of two popular anti-Chinese songs of the 19th century.

MATERIALS

For the class:

- Computer, projection screen, and speakers (for class viewing of online/downloaded video clips)
- “The Peopling of America” student organizer answer key (download [here](#))
- For each group of 3-5 students:
- Computer with internet access
- “The Peopling of America” student organizer (download [here](#))

PREP FOR TEACHERS

Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to:

Preview all of the video segments and websites used in the lesson.

Download the video clips used in the lesson to your classroom computer, or prepare to watch them using your classroom’s Internet connection.

Bookmark the websites used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom. Using a social bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us or diigo (or an online bookmarking utility such as portaportal) will allow you to organize all the links in a central location.

Print out a copy of “The Peopling of America” student organizer for each group of 3-5 students and one answer key for your own use.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students what nationality or ethnicity they most associate with the words “immigrant” or “immigration” in America today. (*Accept all answers.*) Explain that the largest immigrant demographic in the United States is currently Mexican, but that this has not always been the case. Explain that America has always been a nation of immigrants, and that the people migrating to the United States have changed over time in response to historical events and circumstances.

2. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students, and assign each group to a computer. Distribute a copy of the “Peopling of America” student organizer to each group, and have them navigate to the “Peopling of America” website (http://www.ellisland.org/immexp/wseix_5_0.asp). Allow the groups 15 minutes to complete their organizers based on information they’ll find on the website.

3. When all groups have completed their organizers, have groups report their answers to each of the questions in turn. Consult the “Peopling of America” Answer Key during your discussion. Offer corrections as necessary to ensure the class has a collective understanding of the broad outlines of how American immigration patterns have evolved over the years.

4. Explain that the “Know-Nothings” of the mid-19th century were examples of American “nativists”—Americans who favor the interests of established inhabitants of the United States over those of newcomers and immigrants. Ask students if they think nativists still exist today? (*Accept all answers, but encourage an understanding that there is strong anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States today.*) Ask student which immigrant demographic they think is most directly protested by nativists today. (*Mexicans and other Hispanics—particularly those who immigrate illegally.*)

5. Tell students that they will now be watching the music video of “Can’t Afford The Sunshine” by Lloyd Marcus—a contemporary American singer-songwriter and conservative political activist. Provide a focus question by asking how Marcus’ song characterizes illegal immigrants from Mexico. Log on to <http://www.lloydmarcus.com/?p=91> and PLAY Lloyd Marcus’ “Can’t Afford The Sunshine” music video.

6. Review the focus question: how does Marcus’ song characterize illegal immigrants from Mexico? (*Thieves, freeloaders, unwilling to assimilate, etc.*) Write each response on the blackboard or whiteboard.

7. Tell students that nativism has been a prominent element of American politics throughout our history, although the immigrant nationalities protested by nativists have changed over time in response to evolving immigration patterns. Explain that this lesson will focus on nativist (or “anti-immigration”) sentiments throughout American history, and the “cold reception” that many immigrant groups have received as a consequence.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students when they think anti-immigrant sentiment first became a political issue in the United States? (*Accept all answers.*) Tell students that they will now be taking a look at a clip from the PBS series *FACES OF AMERICA*, in which host Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and one of the series' participants, comedian Stephen Colbert, discuss one of the earliest anti-immigrant sentiments in American history, expressed by one of our most prominent and influential Founding Fathers, Ben Franklin. Provide a focus question by asking students what they think Franklin was afraid of. **PLAY Clip 1: "A Colony of Aliens."**
2. Review the focus question: What was Franklin afraid of? (*That the massive German immigration to Pennsylvania would "Germanize" the colony, overwhelming its English language and customs.*) Ask students if this sounds similar to anything they see in the news regarding immigration today. (*Yes—the exact same arguments are used today by those in favor of restricting immigration.*) Tell students that Franklin wrote this comment about German immigrants in 1751—a quarter of a century before the United States was even established as a nation!—and that his concerns have been at the core of anti-immigration sentiment to this day.
3. Ask students what they think of Franklin's remark about the Germans' "complexion"? (*Accept all answers, but encourage an understanding that Franklin is making a racial distinction between English and Germans.*) Ask students if they think that's a distinction which many people would make today? (*No.*) Explain that throughout history and across the world, racial distinctions are often very relative; even in populations we would consider relatively racially homogenous (like that of the mid-18th century American colonies, with the major exception of African slaves) the slightest physical differences have historically been seized upon and trumped up by those who, like Franklin in this case, would use race to elicit and exacerbate hostile reactions against more general cultural differences. Tell students that in the very racially homogenous England of earlier centuries, there even existed racial prejudices against redheads! Ask students which larger ethnicity they think this hostility might have been directed toward? Which nationalities are most associated with red hair? (*The Celtic peoples of Scotland and Ireland.*) Why do they think this might have been the case? (*England had a long history of exploiting and repressing its "Celtic Fringe."*)
4. Tell students that this longstanding English prejudice against the Irish in particular carried over to their former colonies in America in an especially virulent form, fueling this nation's first major anti-immigration movement. Have students log on the "Anti-Irish Cartoons" (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/omalley/120/alien/two.html>) website. Allow them ten minutes to explore the site's five webpages devoted to 19th century American caricatures of Irish immigrants. Provide a focus question by asking students to keep a list of what attributes characterize the Irish caricatures in these cartoons.
5. Review the focus question: What attributes characterize the Irish caricatures in these cartoons? (*Drunken, apelike, violent, cowardly, cruel, primitive, ignorant, uncivilizable, and even inhuman.*) Ask students if any of these qualities apply to the general perception of Irish people in America today? (*No.*) Explain that these caricatures are only a more extreme example of the kind of racial stereotyping employed by Franklin against the Germans; like that earlier anti-immigrant stereotype, their purpose was to racially charge the entire issue of immigration and build opposition to the larger social, economic, and cultural changes that the immigrants represented.
6. Ask what brought the majority of Irish to America in the first place? (*The Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s.*) Explain that a very large proportion of these immigrants fleeing poverty and starvation in Ireland were indeed poor tenant farmers. Unable to afford better, they often lived in crowded, filthy urban ghettos that disgusted many of their countrymen.

American workers, moreover, felt threatened by the Irish willingness to accept lower wages—a trait which the largely unskilled Irish considered necessary for their survival. A great deal of the hostility the new immigrants encountered, however, had nothing to do with anything depicted in the cartoons. Ask students if they know the single largest cultural change the Irish brought with them to America? (*Roman Catholicism*). Explain that the Irish were the first major Roman Catholic immigration group in the United States, and that for many American Protestants of that era that branch of Christianity, with its supposedly “papist” allegiance to the foreign Vatican, represented an entirely different religion from the own. Ask students if they can think of a modern parallel to this 19th century fear and suspicion of Catholics? (*Many Americans today are threatened by the immigration of Muslims today.*)

7. Tell students that throughout this nation’s history, one generation’s immigrant has been the next generation’s “real” American. Many Irish immigrants of the 1840s had by the 1870s established themselves in American society. In eastern cities they would come to particularly dominate police departments and local politics, where they often came to see the next wave of southern European immigrants like Italians and Greeks with the same prejudice and suspicion they had once suffered themselves. Other Irish immigrants moved west to make their fortunes in the gold mines. Ask students if they know which immigrant population had supplied much of the labor that built the railroads on which the Irish and other easterners had made their journey west? (*The Chinese.*)

8. Ask students what had first brought Chinese immigrants to America in 1849? (*The Gold Rush.*) Explain that with the hard economic times of the 1870s, friction arose in mining towns throughout the west between the Chinese and the poor white miners and laborers—often Irish—who increasingly saw them as unwelcome competition. Have students log on to the “Anti-Chinese Songs” website (www.columbia.edu/itc/history/baker/w3630/edit/chinpoem.html). Allow students ten minutes to read both songs’ lyrics. Provide a focus question by asking them to keep a list of how the Chinese are characterized.

9. Review the focus question: How are the Chinese characterized? (*Ungrateful, unfair merchants, cheap labor, unwilling to assimilate, untruthful, deceptive, disingenuous, greedy, rat and dog eaters.*) Explain that although “The Heathen Chinese” was originally written as a *satire* of Irish anti-Chinese prejudice, both it and “John Chinaman” came to be widely embraced among whites throughout the country as an accurate assessment of the Chinese character. Anti-Chinese sentiments eventually resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882—the first of a series of laws which effectively banned Chinese immigration until World War II.

10. Explain that an “Asian Exclusion” clause of the 1924 Immigration Act extended the Chinese immigration ban to include all Asians. Ask if students think the Japanese were included in that ban? (*Yes.*) What about Indians? (*Yes.*) What about Arabs? (*Accept all answers.*) Explain that while Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and other East and Southern Asians might have been easy to identify and exclude from the United States on racial grounds, enforcing the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 could be considerably more complicated when applied to certain other Western Asian ethnicities. Tell students that they will now be looking at a clip in which Dr. Gates discusses with Jordan’s Queen Noor the Syrian-American heritage of her ancestors, and the ambiguity of their race as Arabs. Provide a focus question by asking if race was more or less of a factor in the Middle East than in America?.
PLAY Clip 2: “Who’s White?”

11. Review the focus question: Was race was more or less of a factor in the Middle East than in America? (*Less. Identity in the Middle East had been determined more by land of origin and religion than race.*) Had Queen Noor’s great uncle argued that race should not be a

factor in determining immigration and naturalization policy? (*No—Noor's great uncle had cited Syrian Arabs' pride in their Christianity and their Caucasian ethnicity as evidence of their "whiteness" to distinguish them from the "Mongolian" Asians which the Exclusion Act sought to ban.*) Ask students what they think of this effort to define race? (*Accept all answers, but encourage an understanding of how ironic it is that the United States—a nation founded on ideals of equality--should ever have placed a higher premium on racial identity than the older lands which American immigrants had left behind.*)

12. Explain that the same 1924 Immigration Act that banned Asian immigration also contained the "National Origins Act," which established strict quotas for those nationalities which were allowed to immigrate. Ask students if they can guess what these quotas were based on? (*A percentage—2%, specifically—of that nationality already residing in the United States.*) Ask students what the motivation of such a policy must have been? (*To maintain the nation's racial status quo, which in 1924 was still overwhelmingly white and Protestant.*) Tell students that this remained the case until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which repealed racial quotas and opened the way for significantly increased immigration from South and East Asia. Explain that this is the policy which remains in place today, but that it has come under intense criticism by those concerned about the most recent wave of mass immigration.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

1. Write the names of the following countries in ranked sequence on a blackboard or whiteboard:

1. Mexico
2. China
3. Philippines
4. India
5. Cuba
6. El Salvador
7. Vietnam
8. Korea
9. Canada
10. Dominican Republic

Ask students what they think this list is? (*It is the list of the top ten countries providing immigrants to the United States today. Explain that this list is from March 2002, but that it reflects current immigration patterns.*)

2. As an in-class activity or as homework, assign each student to write a letter to a hypothetical immigrant from one of these ten countries welcoming him or her to America. Allow students to choose their country, but make sure that at least one student is writing to a hypothetical immigrant from each country on the list. Students should conduct some independent research on their country so that their letters reflect an understanding of the immigrants' culture and what it can contribute to the United States. The letters should also reflect an understanding of potentially problematic differences between the immigrants' culture and society and that of the United States. Letters should warn immigrants about the long history of anti-immigration sentiment in this country (examples from the lesson should be cited), and advise them of possible ways that they might be able to avoid provoking it themselves while still remaining true to their heritage. Tell students that their letters should convey a sense of how negative attitudes toward specific immigrant groups have evolved and improved over time.

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“The Peopling of America”

Student Organizer

1. Prior to 1820, where did the single largest group of immigrants come from?

What historical event(s) motivated their migration?

2. When was the slave trade banned in the United States?

3. During which period in American history did Irish immigration peak?

What historical event(s) motivated their migration?

4. Who were the Know-Nothings and what did they stand for?

Which immigrant group in the 1850's do you think would have been their main target?

5. What nation has supplied the greatest number of immigrants to the United States since 1965?

At what other point in American history has a similarly-sized group of immigrants arrived from a single nation?

What was that nation?

6. What nation was a major source of immigrants during every period prior to 1965?

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“The Peopling of America”

Student Organizer Answer Key

1. Prior to 1820, where did the single largest group of immigrants come from? (*Africa.*)

What historical event(s) motivated their migration? (*The slave trade.*)

2. When was the slave trade banned in the United States? (*1808*)

3. During which period in American history did Irish immigration peak? (*1820-1880*)

What historical event(s) motivated their migration? (*The Irish Potato Famine*)

4. Who were the Know-Nothings and what did they stand for? (*A political party of the 1850s famous for its anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic leanings.*)

Which immigrant group in the 1850’s do you think would have been their main target? (*Irish Catholics.*)

5. What nation has supplied the greatest number of immigrants to the United States since 1965? (*Mexico.*)

At what other point in American history has a similarly-sized group of immigrants arrived from a single nation? (1880s-1930s)

What was that nation? (*Italy.*)

6. What nation was a major source of immigrants during every period prior to 1965? (*Germany.*)