

Irish Immigration Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

Were the Irish considered “white” in the 19th century?

Materials:

- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of Guiding Questions
- Copies of Graphic Organizer

Note: *The main goal of this lesson is for students to recognize that racial categories have changed over time. Students should discover that the Irish were not considered white for most of the 19th century. At the end of the lesson (not before!) you may want to explain that the Irish, in fact, occupied a place of racial ambiguity in America for most of the 19th century.*

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: Brief lecture on Irish immigration:

- Long history of oppression by the British.
- Arrived in the U.S. in the 1840s because of the potato famine.
- Mostly settled in cities, worked in factories.
- Extremely poor.
- Anti-Irish sentiment was really high for a number of reasons:
 - Irish were poor and slums developed in cities; people blamed the Irish for crime, disease, prostitution, alcohol abuse, etc.
 - Irish were Catholic; most Americans were Protestant and claimed Catholics could not be trusted because they would be more loyal to the Pope than to the U.S. government (to this day, the U.S. has only had one Catholic president).
- Know-Nothing Party was strongly anti-Irish and anti-immigrant.

2. Introduce activity: In groups of 4, you will receive 4 pieces of evidence. Answer the questions about each piece of evidence and then decide, as a group:

Were the Irish considered “white” in 19th-century America?

3. Discussion:

- Were the Irish considered “white” in the 19th century?
- What evidence supports the argument that they were considered white? What evidence supports the argument that they were not considered white?
- What does it mean to be white?

Citations:

Thomas Nast, Cartoon, *Harper's Weekly*, December 7, 1876.

"Irish Declaration of Independence," *Puck*, May 9, 1883.

<http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=394>

The Know-Nothing and American Crusader, July 29, 1854.

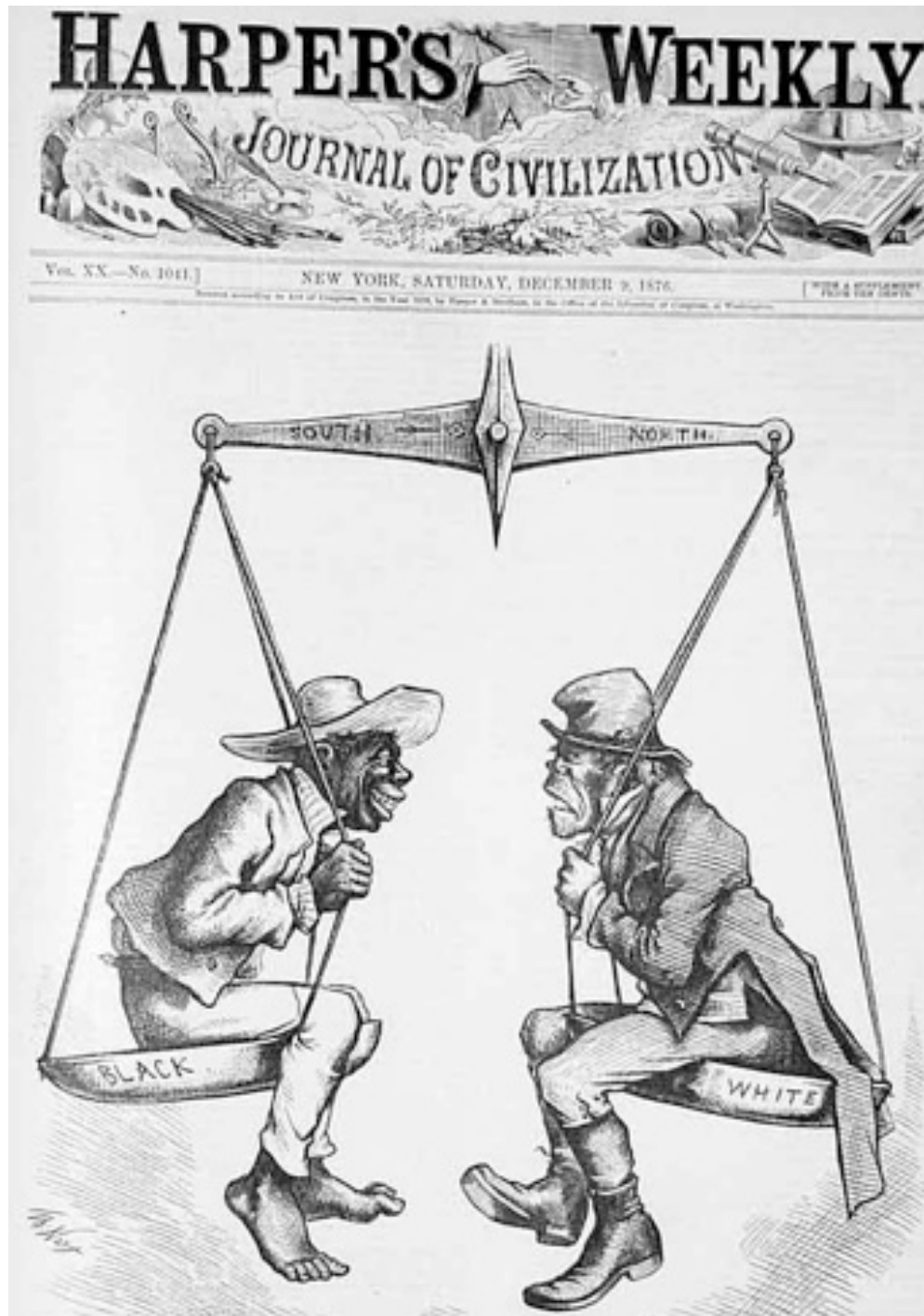
http://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/anticatholicpress.pdf

David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 1991, p. 146.

http://books.google.com/books?id=PwyMmV1_0kMC

Document A: Thomas Nast Cartoon, 1876

This cartoon by Thomas Nast was published on December 7, 1876, in Harper's Weekly.



Document B: Know-Nothing Newspaper

This is an excerpt from an article that appeared in a Boston newspaper, *The Know-Nothing and American Crusader*.

THINGS WHICH ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND ALL TRUE ROMAN CATHOLICS HATE

Providence, July 22, 1854

1. They HATE our Republic, and are trying to overthrow it.
2. They HATE our *Flag*, and they grossly insulting it.
3. They HATE the liberty of the Press.
4. They HATE the liberty of speech.
5. They HATE our Public School system.
6. They HATE the Bible, and would blot it out of existence *if* they could!
7. They HATE Protestants, and are sworn to *exterminate* them from our country and the earth.
8. They HATE all rulers that do not swear allegiance to the Pope of Rome.
9. They HATE to be *ruled by Americans*, and say “WE WILL NOT BE RULED BY THEM!”
10. They HATE to support their own paupers and they are left to be supported by the tax paying Americans.
11. They HATE, above all, the “*Know-Nothings*,” who are determined to rid this country from their cursed power.

—UNCLE SAM

Document C: Historian account

This is an excerpt from historian David Roediger's book Wages of Whiteness.

Irish-Americans workers . . . [were sometimes] used as substitutes for slaves within the South. Gangs of Irish immigrants worked ditching and draining plantations, building levees and sometimes clearing land because of the danger of death to valuable slave property (and, as one account put it, to mules) in such pursuits . . . One Southerner explained the use of Irish labor on the grounds that: "n-----s are worth too much to be risked here; if the Paddies (Irish) are knocked overboard . . . nobody loses anything."

Irish youths were also likely to be found in the depleted ranks of indentured servants from the early national period (early 1800s) through the Civil War. In that position they were sometimes called "Irish slaves" and more frequently "bound boys." . . . In New York City, Irish women comprised the largest group of prostitutes, or as they were sometimes called in the 1850s, "white slaves."

Source: David R. Roediger, Wages of Whiteness, 1991.

Document D: Cartoon

This cartoon by Frederick Burr Opper was published in the magazine *Puck* in 1883. It shows a non-Irish woman imploring her Irish cook to continue her duties. The cook shakes her fist in defiance.



Cartoon text: The Irish declaration of independence that we are all familiar with.

Name: _____

Guiding Questions

Document A

1. (*Close reading*) The man on the right is supposed to be Irish. What comparison is the cartoon making?
2. (*Close reading*) What is the message of this cartoon?

Document B

1. (*Close reading*) Based on this document, what were three reasons the Know-Nothings targeted Irish Catholics?
2. (*Close reading*) Based on this document, what are two reasons why the Know-Nothings believed being Catholic was incompatible with being a United States citizen?

Document C

1. (*Contextualization*) Why were Irish used for difficult labor in the South?
2. (*Close reading*) Based on this document, how were the Irish treated?

Document D

1. (*Close reading*) The woman on the right is supposed to be Irish. Describe what she looks like and how she's acting. Based on this document, what were some stereotypes about Irish women?
2. (*Contextualization*) Based on this document, what job do you think many Irish women had in the 1880s?

Were the Irish considered white in 19th century America?

Evidence that the Irish were considered white	Evidence that the Irish were NOT considered white
<p>Final conclusion: Were the Irish considered white in 19th century America? Please explain your answer using the documents and cartoons above.</p>	

