

## Day 88 Immigration and Social Class in Urban America

**Directions:** Use the data provided below to create a demographic map of New York City in c. 1900 that provides the following data: distribution of immigrant population, population density, approximate distribution of income, occupation category (i.e. labor, merchant, management...)

### THE IRISH

In the 1840's a massive number of Irish-Catholics immigrated to the United States. By 1855, there were over 200,000 Irish in New York City <sup>[7]</sup>. The Irish often arrived in America with few material possessions and were forced to live in squalor. Irish immigrants were poorer than other immigrant groups, and therefore lived in the worst conditions. By the 1840's, Five Points, an infamous slum reported to have averaged one murder per day, was predominantly Irish. This area was located in Manhattan's Sixth Ward near Mulberry Bend <sup>[9]</sup>. Illustrious visitors including Davy Crockett, Charles Dickens (with two police escorts), Abraham Lincoln, and a Russian archduke, came to gawk at the foulness <sup>[10]</sup>. In *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) Dickens wrote: This is the place these narrow ways, diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth... Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays. Many of those pigs live here. Do they ever wonder why their masters walk upright in lieu of going on all-fours? And why they talk instead of grunting? <sup>[11]</sup> In 1855, the population of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Wards of the city, which stretched from the Hudson to the East River south of Canal Street, was thirty-seven percent foreign born Irish.

### THE GERMANS

In the years between 1830 and 1860, there was also an influx of "German" immigrants. There was no unified Germany until 1871; these "Germans" were actually Prussians, Bavarians, Hessians, Rhinelanders, Pomeranians, and Westphalians. Most of the immigrants were farmers that were uprooted by crop failures. However a significant minority were liberals who fled after the revolutions of 1848 failed to democratize Germany. Unlike the Irish, the Germans usually traveled to America with a modest amount of capital, and were able to move West and purchase land in states like Wisconsin and Texas. Milwaukee became known as the "German Athens." Those who stayed in New York often opened their own shops that catered to other immigrants. They were on the whole also more educated than the Irish. The chief German neighborhood in New York City was Kleindeutschland, which lay on the East River between 14th and Grand street <sup>[16]</sup>. By 1865, 57,796 foreign-born Germans lived in Wards Ten, Eleven, Thirteen, and Seventeen, which made up the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

### THE RUSSIAN JEWS

The Russian Jews settled in New York in the largest number. In 1910, there were 484,189 Russian immigrants living in New York City, the majority of which were Jewish. They fled to escape pogroms, or anti-Jewish riots, in the Russian Pale of Settlement <sup>[a]</sup> where they were excluded from farming and most professions. The Jews were more skilled than other immigrant groups; nearly two-thirds of immigrants came to America with knowledge of a craft. In addition, because they were barred from living in agricultural communities in the Pale, they were accustomed to city life. Nonetheless, they had difficulty finding work 60% of the Jewish workforce worked in the garment industry <sup>[23]</sup>. New York was a center of light manufacturing. Families sewed garments at home, and young Jewish women labored in sweatshops. Labor in sweatshops was onerous and dangerous; most of the 146 women killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 were young immigrant girls. The Jews inhabited the old German neighborhoods of the Lower East Side. It became a distinctively ethnic district, filled with Yiddish theaters, history foreign-language newspapers, and synagogues. By 1900, the Lower East Side had 700 people per acre, making it more congested than Bombay, India [25]. Despite these congested conditions, the Jews had a lower death rate than other immigrant groups; The death rate among Jews in Wards Seven, Ten, and Thirteen of the Lower East Side were described as "very low between 15-45 and at other groups of age and at other groups of age also lower than that of almost every other race."

### THE ITALIANS

The second wave of immigration also brought an enormous number of immigrants from the southern provinces of Italy. By 1910, there were 340,765 Italians living in New York. Unlike northern Italy, southern Italy remained un-industrialized. Southern Italian farmers could not compete with American food imports with their pre-industrial hand plows and hoes. In addition, the 1880's were marked by outbreaks of phylloxera, a blight that ravaged vineyards [30].

Southern Italians were rural farmers, and thus were unskilled as urban laborers. Italians came to America with low literacy levels; 54% of southern Italians were unable to read [31]. Italian men often labored as construction workers, digging canals, laying paving and gas lines, building bridges, and tunneling out the New York City Subways. In 1910, 22% of Italian men were employed in the construction sector, comprising one fifth of all construction workers in the city [32]. Italians owed their dominance in municipal works to the padrones, or labor bosses, who met Italian immigrants upon arrival at Ellis Island and secured employment and living quarters. Italian women, like their Jewish counterparts, often labored in sweatshops or did piecemeal work at home. Child labor was commonplace among Italian immigrants and vocation was placed ahead of education. Many Italian immigrants were young men who planned to return to Italy, referred to as "birds of passage." However, hundreds of thousands more stayed. A "Little Italy" formed below Fourteenth Street, in the old Irish neighborhoods, and by 1910 another formed in East Harlem, east of Third Avenue and below 125th street [33]. The conditions were unsanitary and cramped.

Ward	Primary nationality	Total population	Density per acre	Average family size	Percentage of primary nationality of families in tenements
4	Italian	8,344	202	4.8	73.7
6	Italian	18,929	187	4.9	87.3
7	Russian-Jew	89,206	433	5.3	93.2
8	Italian	28,777	163	4.7	92.0
10	Russian-Jew	71,041	652	5.3	89.3
13	Russian-Jew	64,164	589	5.3	93.6
14	Italian	33,595	311	5.0	86.1
15	Italian	22,845	101	5.0	79.0
	Total		Average	Average	Average
	Russian-Jew	224,411	529	5.3	92.1
	Italian	112,490	172	4.9	85.4
	Russian-Jew/ Italian	1.99	3.07	1.08	1.08

**Table II.**  
Family size, population density and housing in New York City, 1900

**THE CHINESE**

The first Chinese immigrants came to Lower Manhattan around 1870, looking for the "gold" America had to offer.[40] By 1880, the enclave around Five Points was estimated to have from 200 to as many as 1,100 members.[40] However, the Chinese Exclusion Act, which went into effect in 1882, caused an abrupt decline in the number of Chinese who immigrated to New York and the rest of the United States.

**THE RICH**

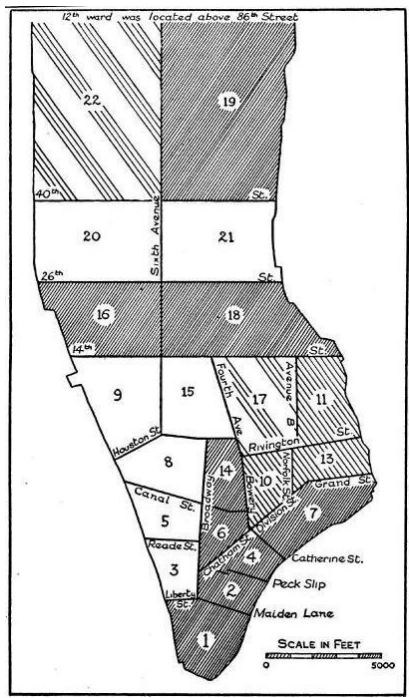
Manhattan millionaires were building lavish palaces along Fifth Avenue, the somber Rockefeller purchased 4 West 54th Street and moved in with his wife, Laura, and their children The Jay Gould House was a mansion located at 857 Fifth Avenue at East 67th Street on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, New York City.

**THE MIDDLE CLASS**

By 1830, many New York City area commuters were going to work in Manhattan from what is now the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, which were not part of New York City at that time. They commuted by ferries. In 1852, architect Alexander Jackson Davis designed Llewellyn Park in New Jersey, a planned suburb served by both ferry and steam railroad. In the 1840s and 1850s, the steam locomotive fostered the development of such New York City suburbs as Tarrytown and New Rochelle. The steam locomotive in the mid 19th century provided the wealthy with the means to live in bucolic surroundings, to socialize in country clubs and still commute to work downtown. These suburbs were what historian Kenneth T. Jackson called the "railroad suburbs" and historian Robert Fishman called a "bourgeois utopia"

Ward	1870	1880	1890	1900
10	381	437	529	661
13	307	347	422	589
11	295	316	347	456
17	331	364	358	454
7	219	244	280	436
14	258	295	274	332
4	285	252	214	235
20	171	195	191	203
6	207	197	226	195
9	152	174	174	190
8	202	208	181	168
19	54	99	147	161
16	145	157	148	159
21	138	162	154	147
18	139	155	148	143
22	48	75	104	128
15	120	138	110	104
12	8	14	42	81
5	107	99	77	52
1	55	68	42	36
2	17	21	12	19
3	36	35	37	18
Total	72	89	110	141

Table 8: Ward level population density (people per acre), 1870-1900. Source: <http://www.demographia.com/db-nyc-ward1800.htm>



New York City c. 1900

