

History
UNFOLDING

THE IRISH IN AMERICA



MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

The “Ould Sod” and the New World

There were Irish immigrants in America in the colonial era. But the Irish only began to be a major force here in the 1840s and ‘50s. It was in those years that more than a million of Ireland’s eight million people suddenly uprooted themselves and sought refuge in the New World. It took a tragedy of unimaginable proportions to convince such massive numbers to abandon their homes and take to the sea and a new life. That tragedy was the Irish potato famine, or what came to be called the “Great Hunger.”

The sudden blight that destroyed Ireland’s potato crop and pushed an already stressed population over the edge was made even worse by failures on the part of Great Britain about which historians still argue today. Whatever the causes of the disaster, the results in the end enriched the United States immeasurably. This was not always clear to non-Irish Americans at the time. The slums in which many of the Irish settled were festering centers of crime and degradation. But in time, the Irish triumphed over these conditions and established thriving communities that contributed to American life in countless ways.

This booklet/visual image set tells the story of the Irish famine and the great wave of immigration to America in the mid-1800s. It does this through 12 visual displays that focus on some of the key themes in this dramatic story. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Famine

The focus here is on the potato famine, the human suffering it caused and the social inequalities and political divisions that made that suffering even more severe.

Exodus and Arrival

This lesson takes a look at the traumatic experience of leaving Ireland and adapting to America and at some of the options available to the Irish once they arrived.

The Irish in America

Here we sample the rich variety of adaptations made to American life by poor Irish laborers, union organizers and agitators and respectable middle-class families. Divided over some things, such as their feelings about the Civil War, they were united by an intense loyalty to the memory of Ireland and to the Catholic Church, which played a fundamental role in their social, educational and spiritual life.

Irish Immigration, American Responses

The response to the Irish was often hostile—at least at first. Seen as an alien presence in the larger cities, their political activities and religious affiliations provoked an ugly nativist response. But over time, the Irish thrived anyway and won the acceptance and respect of most of their fellow citizens.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

The Irish in America: The Great Famine and the Great Migration

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand the scale of the famine that ravaged Ireland and the 1840s.
 2. Students will debate some of the natural and social causes and consequences of the famine in Ireland.
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Famine

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Illustration 1

Rich in nutrition and easy to grow, potatoes were eaten at every meal in Ireland in the early 1800s. Other crops and livestock were raised mainly for export. Potatoes fed the nation. Ireland was already poor when a sudden fungal disease wiped out the potato crop in the late 1840s. Potatoes rotted in the ground and in storage bins. A catastrophic famine set in. These drawings give a sense of the desperation of the poor as they searched in vain for good potatoes to eat. The Great Hunger, as it was called, was one of the great tragedies of the nineteenth century. In six years, the population of Ireland declined from eight to six million. About a million people died from the famine itself. Another million emigrated to the United States, Canada, Australia and Great Britain.

Illustration 2

In the 1840s, Ireland was a part of Great Britain. Millions of Ireland's poor were agricultural laborers, tenants of absentee landlords. Some of these landlords actually lived in luxury in England, only visiting their estates in Ireland perhaps once or twice a year. Even during the famine itself, many of them continued to sell grain and meat abroad. Such landlords often dealt badly with their tenants. At a whim, for example, in order to use their land for grazing purpose, they would force tenants out of their homes and off of the lands. Such tenant evictions were often tragic, as this illustration makes painfully clear.

Illustration 3

Historians still debate how much of the blame should be placed on Great Britain for the horrors of the potato famine. Great Britain can't be faulted for the fungus that wiped out the potatoes. But most historians agree that the British were slow to act in responding to the crisis and did far too little to improve conditions and provide relief to those who were starving. In some English quarters there was an outright callousness toward the suffering of the Irish. Some even claimed that the famine was due to a defect in Irish character. In this harsh British cartoon, titled "The Workingman's Burden," a gleeful Irish peasant is shown carrying his famine relief money while riding on the back of an exhausted English laborer.

Lesson 1—Famine

Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

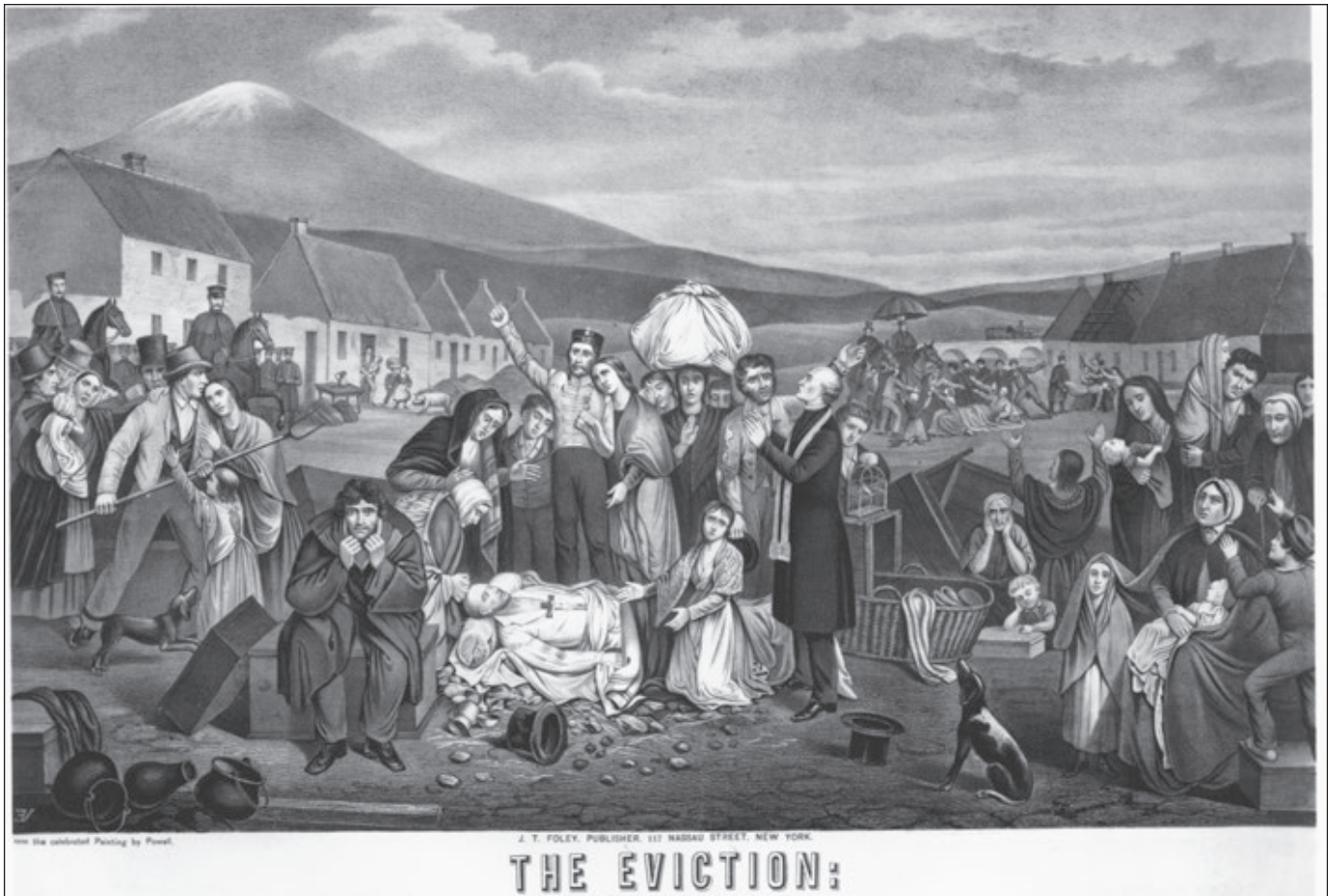
1. Each year, from 1845 to 1850, a fungal disease wiped out the entire harvest of what was a key crop in the nation of Ireland at that time. What crop was that?
2. The failure of the potato crop proved deadly for the people of Ireland. Can you explain why?
3. These two illustrations show starving victims searching the ground for good potatoes. They were among a series of illustrations by artist James Mahony who was commissioned in 1847 by the Illustrated London News to visit the Skibbereen district and make drawings of the misery he found. How would you have reacted upon seeing these images in the Illustrated London News?
4. These images at first led to an outpouring of private giving, but this charitable response did not last long. Why do you suppose that was so? In what ways are images of famine such as these like television images of famine today? In what ways, if any, are they different in their impact?

Follow-up Activities

1. It's been said the potato fed the Irish nation. In 1845, the potato was the main item in the diet of about 4.7 million people. Some three million—mostly poor agricultural laborers—ate it almost exclusively. Why was this? Other crops were grown and livestock was raised. Read more about the role of the potato in Ireland. Find out exactly what other food sources existed there during the famine, and write a report that answers the following question: Why didn't, or why couldn't, the Irish turn to these other sources of food once the potato crop failed?
2. The Irish Potato Famine inspired many songs. Perhaps the most famous of these recounts the suffering in the district of Skibbereen in County Cork. Skibbereen has been called the famine's "ground zero." Find out more about Skibbereen and the suffering that occurred there. Give a brief talk to the class. Be sure to find the words to "Old Skibbereen," and include a recitation of the song (it reads much like a poem) as part of your presentation.

Lesson 1—Famine

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. Millions of poor Irish in the famine were tenants of absentee landlords, many of whom lived in Great Britain. What is an “absentee landlord.” Why might an absentee landlord have been especially troublesome for a tenant farmer.
2. The British Poor Law Extension Act of 1847 made landlords, rather than the British Parliament, responsible for the welfare costs of starving Irish tenants. After this law was passed, evictions in Ireland increased. Why do you suppose that was? More than half a million of the Irish were evicted from their cottages during the Great Famine. Often, the landlords wanted to use their tenants’ lands to graze livestock or raise other crops. Do you think they had a right to evict their tenants for such reasons?
3. From this drawing, what can you conclude about the impact these evictions had on the Irish? How does the drawing convey a certain point of view? Do you think this view is accurate? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read more primary source documents about the Irish Potato Famine. The following Web site contains numerous articles and illustrations from the times in the pages of The Illustrated London News, The Cork Examiner, The Pictorial Times and Punch: <http://viewsofthefamine.wordpress.com> Compare the way articles and illustrations differed from publication to publication. Did the tone of the reports about the famine change over time? If so, how? Prepare a report that answers these questions. Be sure to document your findings by referring to the exact articles or illustrations you find.
2. **Small-group activity:** Learn as much as you can about evictions in 19th century Ireland such as the one shown in the above illustration. Based on what you learn, write a brief one-act play involving the group of people shown in the illustration. Act out your play in front of the class using the overhead of this image as a backdrop.

Lesson 1—Famine

Illustration 3



Punch Archive

Discussing the Illustration

1. At first, the reports of Ireland's suffering produced a great deal of sympathy in Great Britain. Eventually, however, so-called "famine fatigue" set in there. What do you suppose this phrase means?
2. This British editorial cartoon reflects that mood. In it, a British workingman is shown carrying a heavy burden. What is that burden? Can you explain the point of the cartoon and how the cartoon is a reflection of British "famine fatigue"?
3. Many British felt that the famine stemmed from a defect in Irish character. Cartoons like this one portrayed the Irishman in insulting and stereotypical ways. What is the nature of this cartoon's stereotype of the Irish?
4. Historians also say a failed Irish rebellion in 1848 contributed greatly to an increase in negative feelings in Britain toward the Irish, who saw the rebellion as a sign of enormous Irish ingratitude. Do you think the British had a right to be angry? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Charles Trevelyan, the British treasury official in charge of relief operations in Ireland, wrote the great problem was "not the physical evil of the famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the [Irish] people." Some historians harshly criticize such attitudes by British officials toward the suffering of the Irish. Some even go so far as to accuse the British government of committing genocide against the Irish people. Others disagree. "There was no conspiracy to destroy the Irish nation," writes Kevin B. Nowlan. "The scale of the actual outlay to meet the famine and the expansion of the public relief system are in themselves impressive evidence that the state was by no means always indifferent to Irish needs." Read more about this dispute. Report your findings to the class in a discussion about how much blame Great Britain deserves for the suffering of the Irish people during the famine.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better appreciate the challenges that many Irish immigrants faced in uprooting themselves and moving to the United States, as well as the challenges and opportunities awaiting them once they arrived here.

Exodus and Arrival

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Desperate for cash, landlords in Ireland in the 1800s often decided to grow wheat or graze cattle or sheep. But it was hard to do this on land so full of tiny potato plots and the ramshackle cottages of the tenants. Thus, massive evictions took place. To prevent tenants from returning to their homes, the landlords sometimes tore off the roofs of the cottages, as this haunting image from the village of Moveen shows. Often entire villages were “cleared” in this way. Thousands of displaced Irish soon began to look to America for hope. Many left first for Canada. Later, they headed mainly for the United States.

Illustration 2

The trip to America was difficult and dangerous—especially traveling in steerage, the area of a ship reserved for the lowest paying passengers. Vessels full of Irish immigrants in steerage came to be known as “coffin ships.” For those who survived, arrival offered hope, but also new dangers and confusions. Here are scenes of Irish immigrants in U.S. ports. On the right, arrivals in New York are examined by doctors. Most of the Irish settled in cities. Women took low-paying jobs as domestic servants and men worked as laborers in shops and factories. By the mid-1800s, the Irish filled some of the worst and most dangerous slums in New York, Boston and other cities. They faced resentment and prejudice as they competed for jobs in increasing numbers with native-born workers.

Illustration 3

As a result of the Great Famine, many Irish immigrants wished to avoid rural life. However, not all of them settled in cities on the East Coast. Large numbers escaped the slums and took their chances out West. Irish workers found jobs in mines and on cattle drives. The men on the left worked as teamsters, hauling wood to Fort Verde, Arizona, in 1874. Some worked on the railroad. The scene on the right shows Irish and Chinese laborers working on the last mile of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Like so many others, many Irish were lured to California by the gold rush of 1849. By 1870, the Irish constituted the largest foreign-born group in California.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. Landlords in Ireland who wanted to grow wheat or graze sheep or cattle were often unhappy about the villages of tenants on their land. Why might they have wanted to get rid of these villages?
2. This scene shows what many landlords did to keep evicted families from returning to their homes. From the illustration, can you explain what the landlords did? Why do you suppose this tactic proved so effective for them?
3. In many cases, landlords actually paid the passage for their tenants' voyage to America. Why do you think it was worth it to these landlords to pay tenants just to leave their lands?
4. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Irish left in the 1840s and 1850s. They mainly went to Canada and then to the United States. What do you suppose the residents of this village must have felt about leaving their village and going to America?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Your group's task is to design and write stories for a front page of your local newspaper. The date of your newspaper will be Dec. 22, 1849, the same as the actual issue of *The London Illustrated News* shown here. News has been filtering in to your town lately of the horrors of the Irish Potato Famine. Much of this news has come from recently arrived immigrants from Ireland. But you've also seen some issues of *The Illustrated London News* and other publications from the British Isles. Write headlines and stories for your front page. Create a masthead (name, date, etc.) for the top of your newspaper. Find or draw your own illustrations of the events you write about and include them with the stories. You can find lots of contemporary illustrations at the following Web site:

<http://viewsofthefamine.wordpress.com>

Display your newspaper front page on the bulletin board.

Lesson 2—Exodus and Arrival

Illustration 2



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress



Discussing the Illustrations

1. Those immigrants who survived stormy seas and cramped, unhealthy steerage compartments had to contend with new dangers once they arrived—as the immigrants on the left are doing. What types of dangers or indignities might these Irish immigrants have had to watch for in a setting such as this one?
2. Before 1855, passengers could disembark directly onto the wharves of Manhattan, as in the illustration on the left. The immigrants on the right are arriving at Castle Garden at the tip of Manhattan, the official landing station used for New York arrivals after 1855. How do the artists make clear which figures are immigrants and which are native-born Americans? Are the immigrants depicted favorably or unfavorably? Explain your answer.
3. From what you know of New York and America in general in the mid-1800s, what major challenges and opportunities awaited these new arrivals?

Follow-up Activity

1. Over 5,500 Irish people who emigrated during the famine years are buried in mass graves at Grosse Ile, Quebec. Grosse Ile was the quarantine station for the Port of Quebec, long the main port of arrival for immigrants to Canada. Read more about the experiences of immigrants arriving at Grosse Ile during the potato famine. Pay special attention to the 1847 typhoid epidemic. Your teacher or librarian can help you find books on the subject. One particularly interesting book is *Eyewitness: Grosse Ile, 1847*, by Marianna O’Gallagher (Carraig Books, Sainte Foy, Quebec, 1995). There are also numerous Web sites with useful information. Give a presentation to the class on the subject of Grosse Isle. Be sure your report deals with the following questions: How many famine and fever victims were the medical authorities at Grosse Isle prepared to handle? How many arrived in 1847? Why were they so unprepared? What was the general state of the Irish emigrants as they arrived at Grosse Isle?

Lesson 2—Exodus and Arrival

Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress



Discussing the Illustrations

1. These two illustrations depict Irish immigrants who made their way west. The photo on the left shows a group of Irish “teamsters” hauling wood to Fort Verde, Arizona, in 1874. The illustration on the right shows Irish immigrants working alongside Chinese laborers as they help build a very famous railroad completed in 1869. It was the first of its kind. Can you explain?
2. Aside from mining and working on the railroads, what other types of employment might Irish immigrants have found in the American West?
3. In spite of what these illustrations show, most Irish immigrants settled in the big cities on the eastern seaboard. Back in those cities, the Irish in the 1840s and ‘50s moved into some of the worst city slums imaginable. Why would city slums in the mid-1800s have been so bad? Why do you suppose the Irish chose to live in these slums instead of heading out to the frontier territories in those decades?

Follow-up Activity

1. In an article appearing on February 3, 1855, in the *Citizen*, New York’s Irish American weekly, a writer urged immigrants to head west: The great mistake that emigrants make, on arriving in this country is, that they remain in New York, and other Atlantic cities, till they are ruined, instead of proceeding at once to the Western country, where virgin soil, teeming with plenty, invites them to its bosom. Here, from the inadequate protection afforded them by the Commissioners of emigration, they become the easy prey of runners, boarding-house keepers and other swindlers; and, when their last cent is gone, they are thrown into the street, to beg or starve or steal, for employment there is none. Imagine you are the mayor of New York City in 1855. Write a letter to the editor of the *Citizen*, responding to this article. Then, as the author of the original article, write a letter in response to the mayor.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand some of the unique characteristics of the Irish immigrants of the mid-1800s.
2. Students will better appreciate the variety of life experiences of the Irish in America.

The Irish in America

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Like many immigrant groups, the Irish tried hard to hold on to their cultural heritage. For example, St. Patrick's Day, March 17, the traditional feast day of Ireland's patron saint, has evolved into an annual celebration of Irish American ethnic identity. In the sentimental print on the left from 1872, a mother gets her children ready for the St. Patrick's Day parade. The two flags on the wall attest to the family's loyalties—to their new home in America and to the memories they still have of Ireland. The Catholic Church was an important force in the lives of Irish immigrants, comforting them emotionally and spiritually in an often hostile, new environment. On the right is an illustration of a grand requiem mass held in 1863 in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral for members of the Irish Brigade killed in the Civil War.

Illustration 2

The Irish played a key role in the emerging labor movement in the 1800s. Irish immigrant coal miners in Pennsylvania, fed up with brutal conditions, formed a secret society called the Molly Maguires, named after an anti-landlord organization back in Ireland. They engaged in a campaign of violence and terror against the mine owners. Eventually the authorities broke up the "Mollys." Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, on the right, was an Irish immigrant who also campaigned for the working poor. Unlike the Molly Maguires, she stayed within the law organizing unions to improve working conditions in mines, mills, railways and factories.

Illustration 3

More than 150,000 men born in Ireland fought for the Union in the Civil War. On the left, a Catholic priest preaches to members of the Ninth Massachusetts, a regiment of Irish volunteers from the Boston area. Yet many Irish immigrants also resented the Civil War and the goal of freeing the slaves, which that war finally achieved. In 1863, many Irish and other New Yorkers vented their anger against a new draft law, which allowed men to avoid serving if they provided a substitute or paid \$300. This "rich man's exemption" outraged many Irish. In the New York City Draft Riot of 1863, mobs took to targeting the city's black population, even setting fire to an orphanage for black children, as the image on the right shows. Hundreds were killed in this tragic upheaval.

Lesson 3—The Irish in America

Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. About three-quarters of the nearly five million Irish who came to America after 1820 were members of a religious faith not common in early America. What faith is that?
2. Irish immigrants often made a real effort to hold on to their cultural and ethnic heritage. Their Catholicism was an important part of that heritage. In the painting on the left, an Irish mother readies her child for the important Catholic holiday and parade that takes place on March 17. What holiday is that? What else does this painting suggest about the life of Irish immigrants in America? How realistic do you think the scene in the painting is? Explain your answer.
3. The engraving on the right shows a mass being celebrated in New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1863 for Irish soldiers killed in the Civil War. For poor Irish immigrants, the Catholic Church was often a source of charity, comfort and guidance. What types of help might a new arrival expect to find from his or her local priest?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** St. Patrick's Day is one of the most visible symbols of Irish American influence in America. Your group's task is to come up with as many images as you can that help show the impact Irish Americans have had on our country over the past 150 years. Use these images, along with appropriate written commentary, to create a bulletin board display titled "The Irish in America."
2. Imagine you are an Irish-born immigrant in the United States. As a young man or woman, you made the dangerous journey to America to escape the potato famine. It's now 1870. You live in New York City and have a family of your own. Pretend the image on the left here is on a postcard. Send this postcard to a relative in Ireland. Write about how your life has changed since you emigrated and why you choose this postcard to send back home. Then, pretend you are the Irish relative and write a letter in response to the postcard and its message.

Illustration 2



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Irish immigrants generally took low paying jobs. Often this led them to support efforts to improve working conditions for the poor. The scene on the left shows a secret meeting of a group of Irish miners known as the Molly Maguires, named after an anti-landlord organization back in Ireland. What do you know about the activities of this group? How does the image of them here fit with what you already know?
2. The woman on the right was one of the most forceful Irish labor activists of her time. Her full name was Mary Harris Jones. By what other name is she generally known? What attributes do you suppose Mother Jones brought with her as an Irish immigrant that helped make her an effective union organizer?
3. Native-born non-Irish crafts workers also often tried to organize unions in the mid-1800s. However, they were not always supportive of the Irish workers in their communities. Why do you suppose that was?

Follow-up Activity

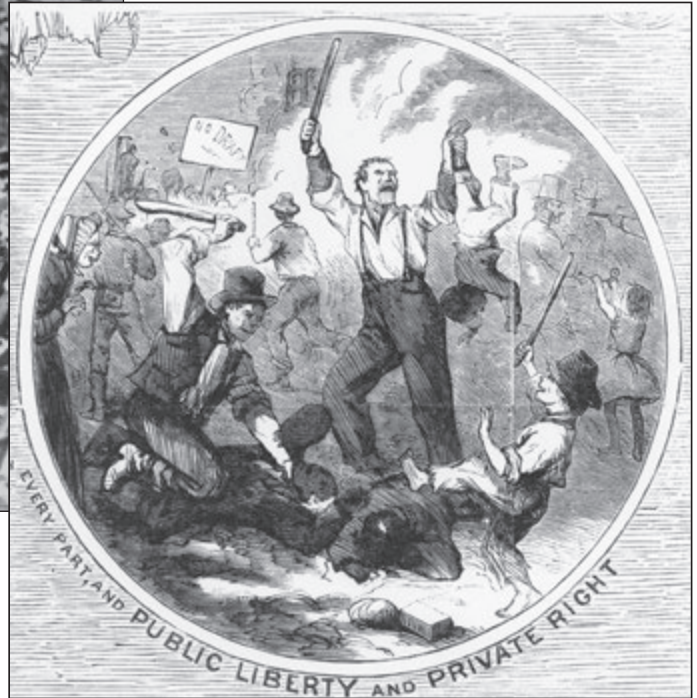
1. In *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1990), Mary Harris “Mother” Jones writes about the conditions she witnessed in 1903 at a Kensington, PA, textile factory:

Every day the little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle. They were stooped little things, round shouldered and skinny. Many of them were not over ten years of age, although the state law prohibited their working before they were twelve years of age.

Read *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* to learn more about her. Create a bulletin board display that shows how she helped improve working conditions for the poor. Find photos of Mother Jones and other images to illustrate your display. The photos of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis could be useful. Use excerpts from the Mother Jones autobiography to provide commentary for the photos.

Lesson 3—The Irish in America

Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. On the left, a group of Irish-born American soldiers listens to a sermon by a Catholic priest. From the photo, can you tell which war these soldiers are in and on whose side they fought?
2. More than 100,000 Irish-born immigrants fought in the American Civil War, mostly for the North. But not all Irish were willing to fight in the war. In 1863, a huge riot broke out in New York City over a new draft law. A large share of the rioters were Irish workers. The drawing on the right is from that riot. In part, the rioters were expressing the anger of the poor toward the rich. From what you know of the Civil War draft laws, can you explain why they might have caused this anger?
3. But as the drawing shows, the main victims in the riot were African Americans. Possibly hundreds were killed. Many buildings were burned. Why do you think poor Irish workers, in particular, had become so upset and so violent in this way? Why did they take out their frustrations on African Americans?

Follow-up Activities

1. Many “potato famine immigrants” joined the Union army. Up to one-fourth of all foreign-born volunteers for the Union came from Ireland. Numerous all-Irish regiments—such as New York’s renowned “Fighting 69th”—banded together to form the “Irish Brigade.” Read more about the Irish regiments that fought in the Civil War. Prepare a report that tries to explain why so many immigrants volunteered to struggle and die for a cause, and a nation, they barely knew.
2. Isabelle Holland presents one point of view about the New York City draft riots of 1863 in the historical novel *Behind the Lines* (Econo-Clad Books, 1999). Read this novel and prepare a brief talk to the class about it. Explain the views of the novel’s main character, a girl named Katie O’Farrell. Katie is a young Irish girl in New York. In your talk, explain how being Irish affects Katie’s feelings about the Civil War, America and the 1863 draft riots.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand how the Irish were perceived by others in America in the 1800s.
2. Students will be aware of the types of ethnic and religious stereotyping to which the Irish were subjected in the 1800s.

Irish Immigration, American Responses

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Many Americans welcomed the Irish. Unfortunately, many others did not, as these two editorial cartoons make clear. The cartoons have to do with the impact of the Irish on the political life of New York City. In return for jobs and other help, poor Irish voters often supported candidates named by Tammany Hall, the corrupt Democratic Party political organization that often ruled New York in the 1800s. The cartoon on the left refers to a split between Tammany and another Democratic Party faction. It also belittles the Irish as ignorant alcoholics willing to vote for any candidate who “Tips most”—that is, who offers enough money in exchange for his vote. The other cartoon berates the Irish for “enslaving” themselves to this political organization for money, jobs or even a few drinks

Illustration 2

As this editorial cartoon indicates, many native-born American Protestants feared the Roman Catholicism of the Irish. Anti-Catholic bigots often pictured the Church as an alien and secretive force that would undermine basic American values. The “Propagation Society” mentioned in the caption here refers to a Catholic organization that worked to spread the faith in America. On the shore in the cartoon, Brother Jonathan and a boy labeled “Young America” tell the Pope, who is coming ashore, that he and the bishops in the boat are not welcome in America.

Illustration 3

Many Irish immigrants saw themselves as “exiles,” forced to leave Ireland because of famine and what they viewed as British tyranny and landlord oppression. Thus they often had a strong sense of longing for their native land. They nurtured memories of an idealized Ireland and passed them down from generation to generation, in part through many of their favorite songs. These two music covers from the late 1800s give a sense of this deeply felt longing. On the right, the phrases “Ould Sod” and “Emerald Isle” are two well-known nicknames for Ireland. Many of the song titles refer fondly to days gone by. Millions of Irish and non-Irish Americans alike have been influenced by this warm image of an Ireland fondly recalled. These positive feelings about Ireland, and about the Irish who came here and contributed so much, are also a part of the response of America to this key group of immigrants to a new land.

Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Images of the Irish in cartoons like these in the 1800s often reflected the fears and prejudices directed against this group of immigrants. The two cartoons make fun of the Irish for supporting the political machine known as Tammany Hall in New York City. Can you briefly explain what is meant here by the phrase “political machine”?
2. On the left, the Irish voter claims to be “independent,” saying he will give his vote “to him as tips most.” On the right, another Irish voter is shown as “enslaved” by Tammany in exchange for something else. Can you tell what that is? Both cartoons are typical of the insulting stereotypes often applied to the Irish. What insulting stereotypes do they illustrate?
3. Some historians say the political machines of the 1800s actually served a good purpose in giving out jobs and other help to poor immigrants in exchange for their votes. What do you think these historians mean? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Pretend you are writing a U.S. history textbook. You have decided to use these two political cartoons in the section on immigration and the prejudice immigrants often encountered. Create your own captions for these two cartoons. Then come up with a student activity for each cartoon.
2. Read a biography of Al Smith, the Irish American statesman and presidential candidate who was prominent in U.S. politics in the 1920s. Pay special attention to his boyhood and upbringing. Then write a report that focuses on the degree to which Smith’s life might be seen as typical of the entire Irish American experience: poor beginnings and, through hard work and perseverance, ultimate success and prosperity. Give a brief talk to the class summarizing your report. As a part of your talk, explain what you think Smith would have said about the above two cartoons.

Lesson 4—Irish Immigration, American Responses

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This is another political cartoon that belittles the Irish and shows the distrust many native-born Americans felt toward them. Specifically, the cartoon illustrates the deep hostility many Americans felt toward Irish Catholicism—and, in particular, toward its spiritual leader, shown coming ashore in this scene. What official leads the Catholic Church?
2. The Pope waves a sword and tells Americans “My friend we have concluded to take charge of your spiritual welfare and your temporal estate.” But the boy labeled “young America” holds up a Bible and says “we can take care of our own worldly affairs, and are determined to ‘Know nothing’ but this book.” The phrase “Know nothing” actually has two meanings here. From your knowledge of U.S. history, can you explain?
3. What view of the Catholic Church does this cartoon present? Why do you suppose so many people were fearful of Catholicism in this way in the 1800s?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about the discrimination faced by all immigrants, not just the Irish, in the 1800s. Prepare a report that answers these questions: How did the religious discrimination suffered by the Irish compare with the discrimination faced by the other ethnic groups of that time? Add some thoughts as to how this discrimination was similar to, or different from, any discrimination faced by immigrant groups in America today.
2. **Small-group activity:** When the boy in the above cartoon uses the phrase “Know nothing,” it has a double meaning, referring in part to the political party of the same name. Read more about the “Know Nothings” (officially, the American Party). Look through other history books in the library for other cartoons, illustrations and ads from the 1800s that use the theme of “nativism”—the belief that native-born Americans were superior to immigrants. Bring these illustrations in and use them to help you guide the class in a discussion of nativism in the 1800s.

Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

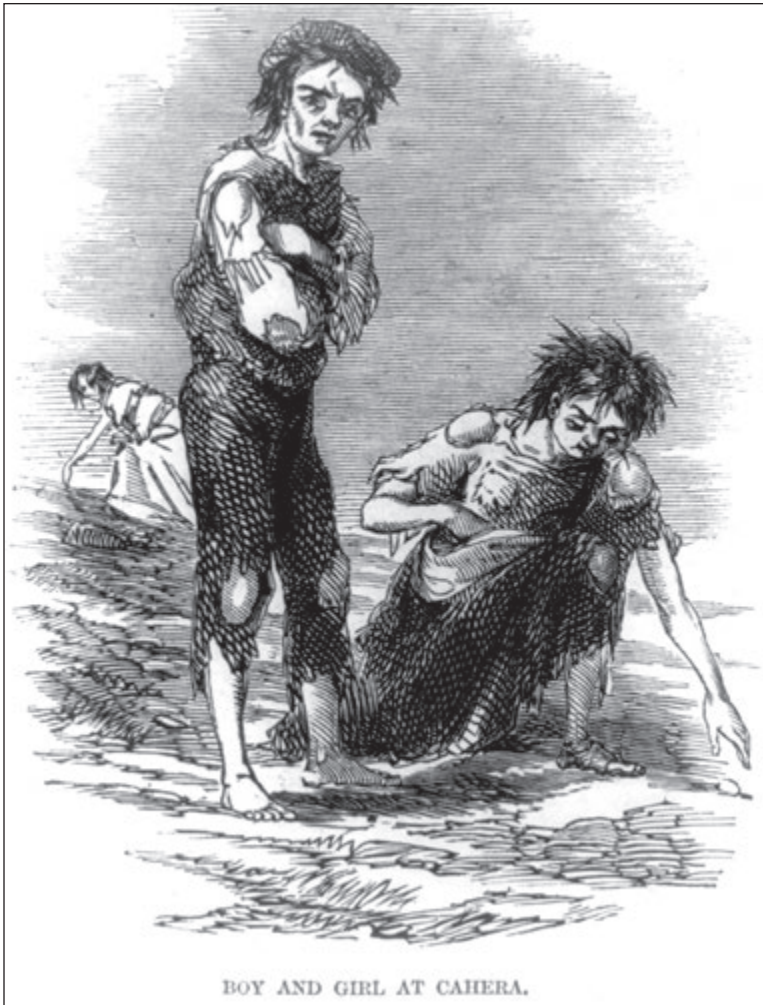
1. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of Irish America's favorite songs expressed a deep longing for the homeland. Here are two sheet music covers from the late 1800s that do this. What idea or image of life in Ireland do these music covers suggest?
2. Some might say that songs like these romanticized an Ireland that Irish Americans never really knew, even those who were born there. Can you explain what they mean? Do you agree that the image of Ireland offered by these covers is "romanticized"? Why or why not?
3. The idyllic illustration on the right certainly doesn't give any hint of the troubles most Irish left behind when they immigrated to America. Why do you think such images appealed both to the Irish in America and to many non-Irish Americans?
4. Today, Irish culture and heritage still fascinate many Americans, Irish and non-Irish alike. What do you suppose accounts for this fact?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Many non-Irish Americans love Irish music. This is also true of the music of other ethnic groups. Learn more about the music brought to America, or developed in America, by other ethnic groups, such as Italians, Mexicans, East European Jews, Poles, African Americans, etc. Do some research and bring in some of this music to share with the class. However, be sure to provide some background information on the music you play for the class. Make this ethnic musical festival an educational as well as a musical experience.
2. **Small-group activity:** Find other parts of Irish culture besides music that flourish here in America. Learn more about Irish-American poets, novelists, artists, educators, religious leaders and others who have had an impact on Irish-Americans and other Americans. Create a bulletin board display of photos, artwork, articles and your group's own written descriptions of the achievements of such people.

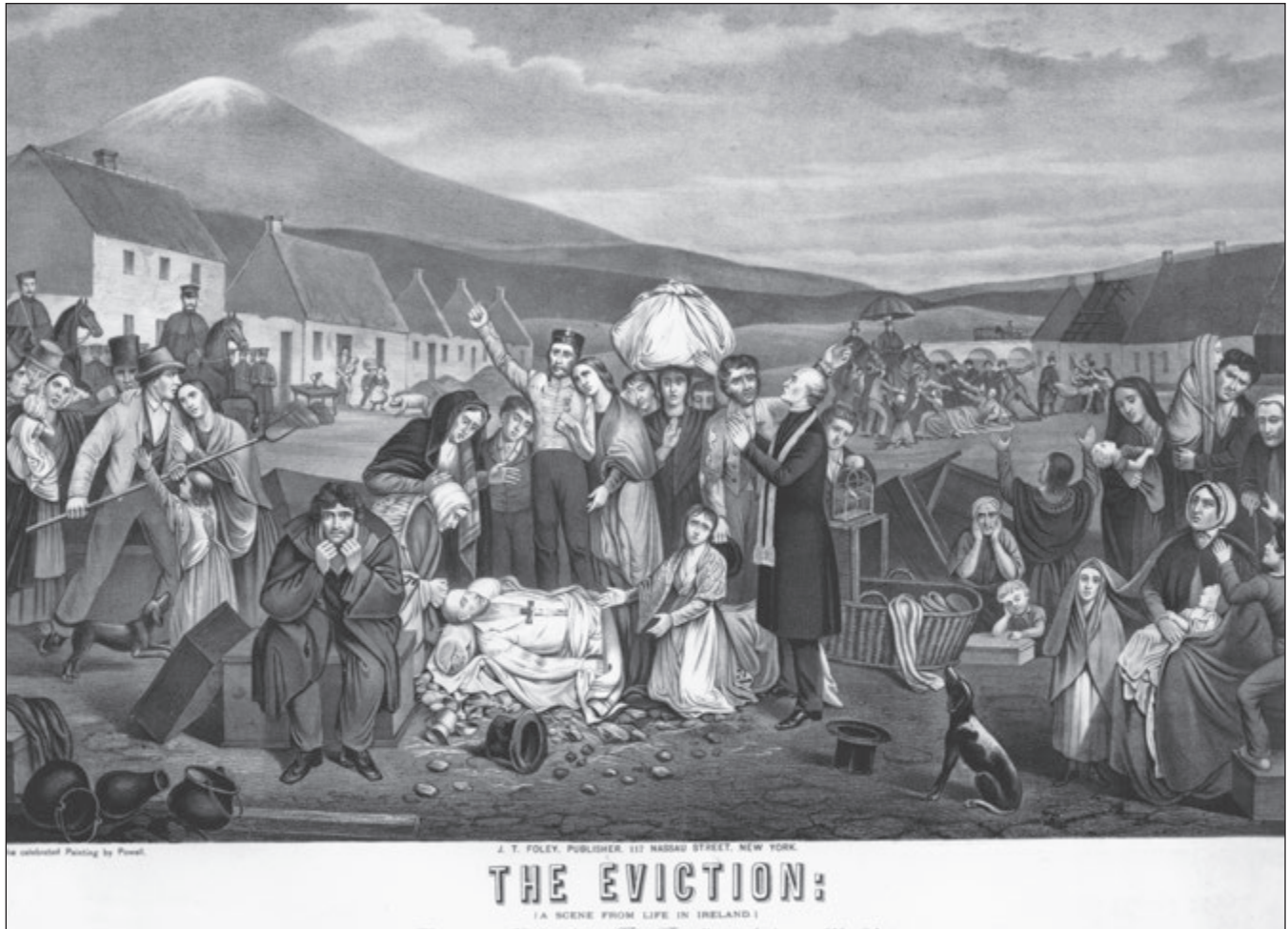
Image Close-ups

Famine Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Famine Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Famine Illustration 3



Punch Archive

Exodus and Arrival

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Exodus and Arrival

Illustration 2



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Exodus and Arrival

Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Irish in America

Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Irish in America

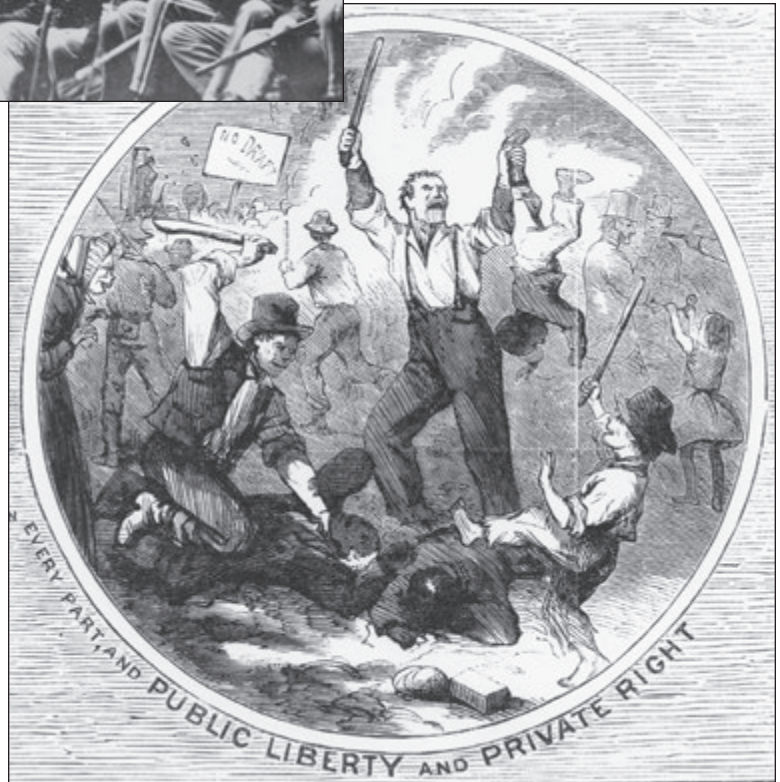
Illustration 2



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Irish in America

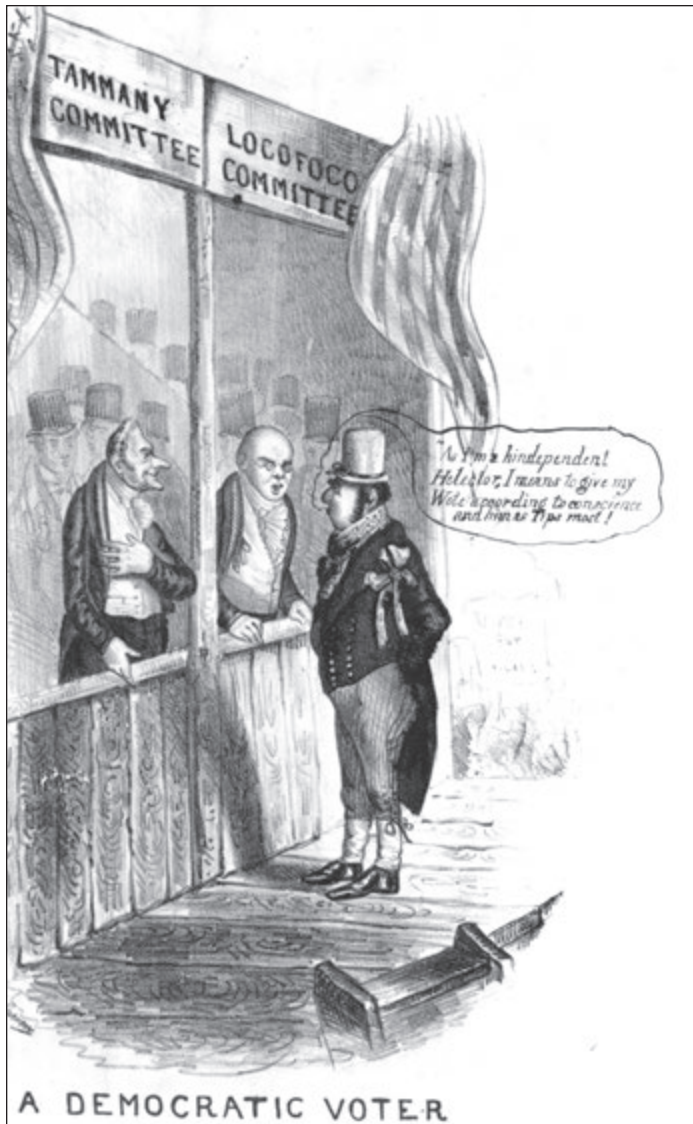
Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Irish Immigration, American Responses

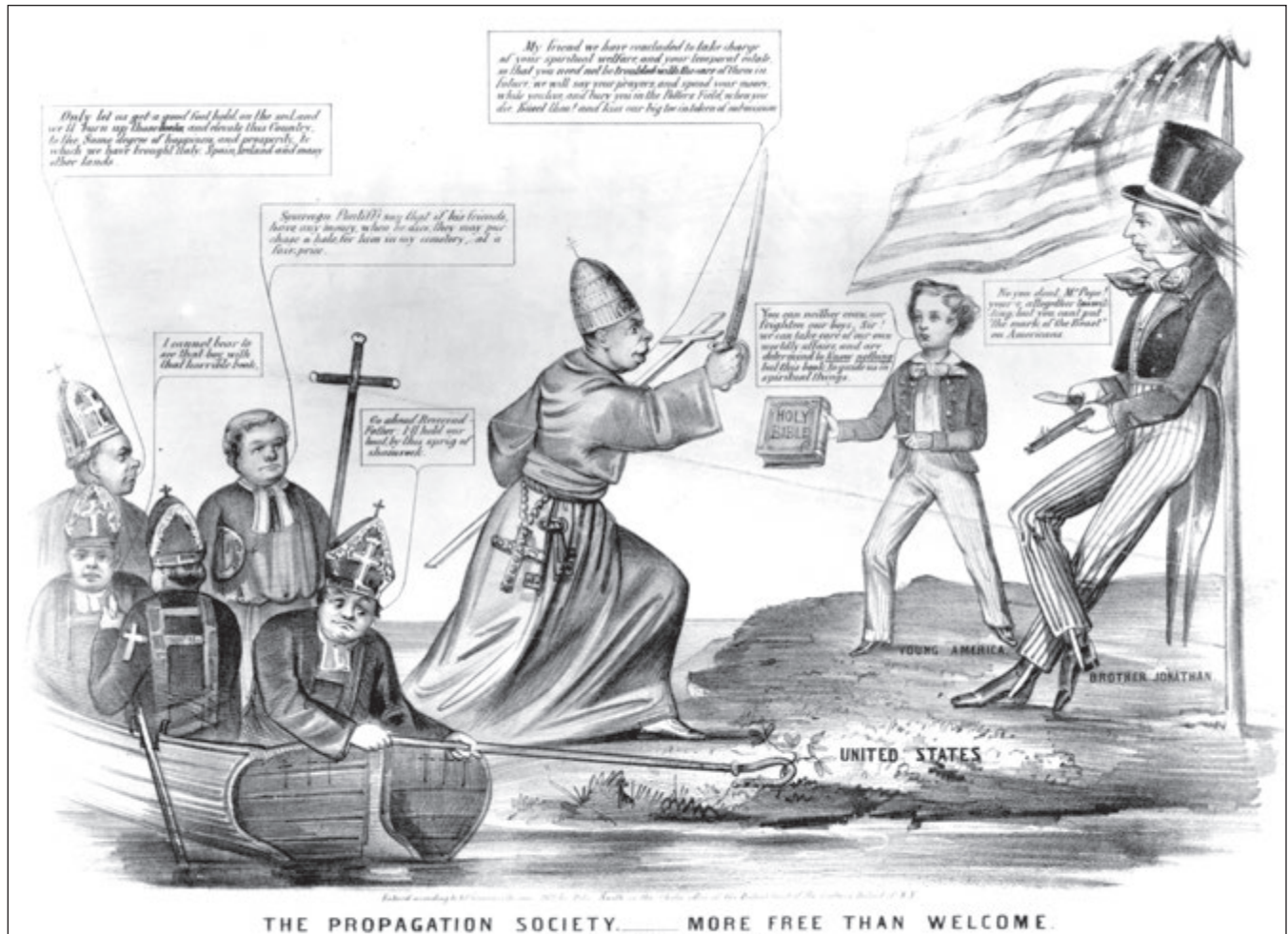
Illustration 1



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

Irish Immigration, American Responses

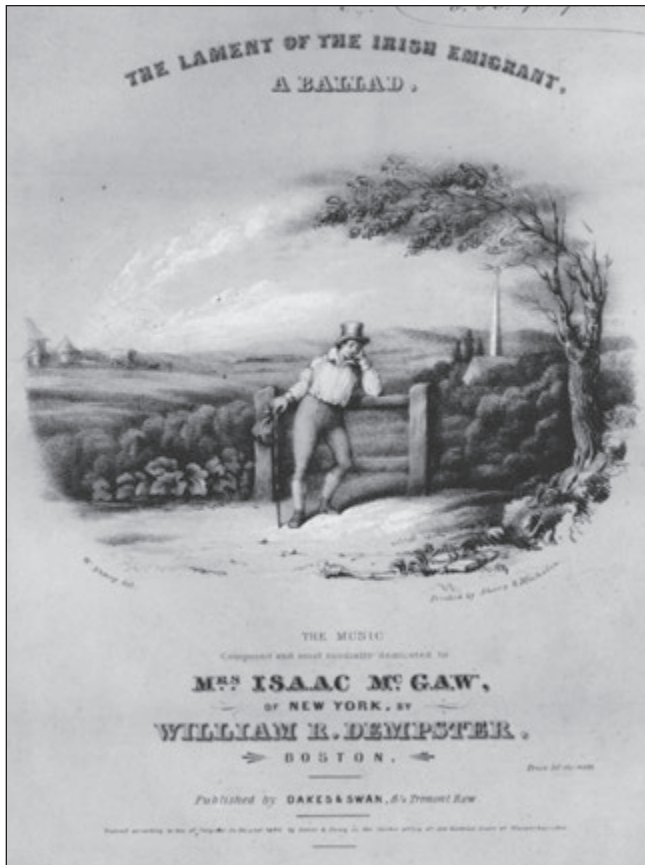
Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Irish Immigration, American Responses

Illustration 3



Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress

