

## **“No Irish Need Apply!”**

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### **Overview**

In the complex world in which we live, how can we rely on statements made by the President of the United States or any other world leader unless we are able to examine and analyze the available evidence used? The important skills of examination, analysis, and proper use of evidence are important to every person in every vocation. Through this curriculum unit I hope to show students the importance of acquiring and sharpening these skills.

America is an immigrant country. No other land can challenge America’s claim as the ultimate melting pot. Immigrants have always been a part of the American scene, but in some periods more people have come than in others. Immigration was governed both by push and pull factors. The primary factors that pulled people toward the New World, especially the United States, were the availability of land, increased economic opportunities, higher wages and greater personal and religious freedom.

During the last three centuries about seven million people came out of Ireland to America’s shores. Most of these people came after the Great Potato Famine of 1845-50. These first young Irish immigrants, who were predominantly male, helped dig America’s first canals, lay the track for the first railroads, pave the first streets and lay the first water lines. While they were subject to the unrelenting anti-Catholicism of the time, their muscle was needed and their numbers were not overwhelming, so they were not particularly resented.

After the wet summer of 1845, a mysterious blight appeared in Ireland. It laid waste to the potato fields almost overnight. The leaves of the potato plants turned black and those potatoes that seemed healthy enough when first dug up, turned

inedible in storage. The people had little to eat and starvation and diseases stalked the land.

The landlords began to evict their tenants, sending families into the countryside with only the clothes on their backs. During the entire period of the Great Famine of 1845-50, more than a million Irish died. Some landlords saw the famine as a great opportunity to rid their land of pesky and rebellious Irish tenants and their unprofitable potato fields and to turn the land into more profitable cattle farms. About 50,000 Irish received passage money from their landlords. Some crossed the ocean gladly while others were herded onto leaky ships meant to transport lumber and cattle rather than human beings. Hundreds of thousands of other Irishmen appealed to their relatives already in the United States and Canada to send passage money and scraped together their last cents to buy tickets. In the years of the Great Famine and directly after, more than 2.5 million Irish emigrated, almost 30% of Ireland's population. (Coffey, Irish in America, p.7)

Most Irish arrived completely penniless. They were literally dumped on America's shores, often sick and malnourished. Initially, they had no money to travel beyond their ports of arrival. Almost all were unskilled and many were illiterate. They had no capital to buy farms, so they had to take the worst jobs. The jobs they were given were almost always the most dangerous. On Southern building projects, Irishmen were often used for the most dangerous jobs because slaves were worth money and Irishmen could be easily replaced.

The Irish immigrants of the famine years created America's first real slums. These new slums horrified middle class urban Americans who saw the Irish as destroying their cities and breeding diseases. The fact that these new immigrants were a drain on the existing social welfare system also did not endear them to old Americans. (IBID, p. 32)

The Irish became politically active more rapidly than other immigrant groups. They quickly joined the Democratic Party and began to be elected to public office. The Irish used their political muscle to reward their friends and punish their enemies. Irish political might was also used to attempt to break the hold of Protestant churches and theology on public institutions such as schools.

The Irish in America survived and thrived partially because of the support and power of the Catholic Church. Led by aggressive Irish-born bishops and based on manpower and devotion of Irish immigrants, the Catholic Church expanded and thrived. The Church was a great source of solace and protection to poor immigrants facing discrimination and the cruelties of the marketplace.

Many Americans were truly prejudiced against the Irish because they believed that they were violent drunks and they also feared their Catholic religion. Signs “No Irish Need Apply” became common in employment ads in major Eastern cities. (IBID, p. 46)

This curriculum unit on immigration targets eighth grade students studying United States History. Students generally welcome the opportunity to become active learners and are eager to solve a series of historical problems themselves rather than simply being told about the past. Therefore, students will actually analyze a wide variety of primary-source material on Irish immigrants, make inferences and draw conclusions based on available evidence. The unit, with its primary documents, photographs, and support materials, will allow both teacher and student to enhance their study of the history of immigration beyond the textbook and classroom.

## **Rationale**

Using primary sources offers students the opportunity to act and think as historians. Students will participate in the hands-on process of history by studying primary documents and photographs. Viewing historic photographs, handling facsimiles of famous documents, and reading the comments and opinions of those in the past will bring history alive for students. Understanding the background of each primary source will help students to put historical events and attitudes into perspective and to walk in the shoes of their ancestors.

Primary sources are a powerful learning and teaching device that provide students and teachers with a window to the past unlike any other kind of resource. In this unit I have attempted to supply the students with an array of primary sources. Teachers, through the use of primary source materials, will enrich their students’ understanding and give meaning to the past.

By participating in the lessons provided in this unit, students will gain an understanding of the challenges faced by immigrants to America. The response of native-born Americans to immigrants has differed greatly from one period to another and from one immigrant group to another. In general, Americans have responded negatively in periods of heavy immigration when immigrants have been perceived to be threatening the social, political and economic stability of the country. They have felt particularly threatened when the immigrants seem to threaten the cultural identity of the nation.

Since Pennsylvania had a large Irish ethnic group, students will examine primary sources dealing with anti-Irish feelings. The Irish were the "new immigrants" of

the 1840s and 1850s.. To many Americans, particularly on the East Coast, it seemed like the country was being invaded by menacing aliens. This made the "old immigrants" uncomfortable. Through the seminar, *Coming Over: The "Old" Immigration*, primary sources will be introduced which will help my students to explore the life of those who immigrated to the United States before 1880. The curriculum unit, *No Irish Need Apply*, will assist students in meeting educational standards in communication and citizenship.

## **Objectives**

Through this unit students will be able to use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary sources of information. By participating in the lessons provided in this unit, students will gain an understanding of the challenges faced by immigrants. Students will read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts such as: testimonies, newspaper articles, editorials, art work, speeches, cartoons and letters. While working in cooperative groups, students will demonstrate that they can work effectively with others. Through their various group projects, students will demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania and the United States. Finally, students will also analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.

## **Strategies**

Everything that is preserved from the past can be used as evidence to solve historical problems. Students will have the opportunity to work with different types of evidence: works of art, political cartoons, statistics, maps, charts, letters, photographs and newspaper accounts. Through this variety of sources, students will learn the methods and skills needed to help them learn the historical content.

Each type of historical evidence is combined with an introduction to the appropriate methodology in an effort to teach students a wide variety of research skills. As much as possible, I have tried to let the evidence speak for itself and have avoided leading students to one particular interpretation or another. This approach is effective in many different classroom situations.

Political cartoons have a long history in American politics. They are an effective tool when expressing a political opinion. Although they may bring a smile or laugh, their subject matter is usually very serious. Political cartoonists express their opinions on these subjects by using the tools of their trade such as

symbolism, caricature, artistic talent, labeling, captioning, slogans, and quick wit. The political cartoonist will use all of his talents to make the reader aware of his political stance on issues. Throughout the years, the issue of immigration and its challenges has been popular topics for the political cartoonists.

Immigration has always brought about debate in America. Some view immigration as a means to add to the flair and depth of American culture. They see the customs, ideas, innovations, motivations, and aspirations brought by the diverse groups coming to the United States as a way to build a stronger nation. They see these multicultural groups united under the idea and structure of the unique brand of democracy in America.

Others focus more on the challenges brought by immigration. They look to the government to regulate and put restrictions on the movement and activities of these groups to safeguard the American public. They cite problems in education, housing, trade, and overcrowding resulting from the incoming immigrants. They are sometimes guilty of using immigrants as a scapegoat for America's shortcomings.

The teacher will guide students in determining the meaning of specific political cartoons. The student must first turn to the setting in which the cartoon is drawn. To understand the cartoon, the reader would have to be familiar with the times in which it was designed.

The next step in finding the meaning of any political cartoon is to notice symbolism. Caricature goes along with symbolism as an exaggerated way to draw attention to a specific person or group. Labeling and captioning are also vital parts of a political cartoon. Using all the parts of the political cartoon leads to determining the opinion being expressed by its author.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Lesson One: Documents**

Documents need to be placed within its proper historical context. This can be done by examining the physical characteristics or unique physical qualities of the document.

Students should answer the following:

- What type of document is it? (newspaper article, diary, letter, speech, etc.)
- What is the date of the document?
- Who is the author of the document?
- What is the author's position or title?
- For what audience was the document written?

- Why was this document written?
- List two things from the document that tell about life at the time it was written.
- Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document.

Appendix A is a newspaper clipping from *The Nation*, an Irish nationalist publication that published information taken from small local newspapers. The scenes of starvation and misery that are described in this news article were taking place in Ireland between 1845 and 1850. The town, Skibbereen, mentioned in the article, was an agricultural market town in the country of Cork on the west coast of Ireland. The people of Skibbereen were extremely dependent upon the potato crop. (See Appendix A)

### **Lesson Two: Statistics**

In the mid-1800s large numbers of immigrants came to America to begin new lives. More than 4 million immigrants settled in the United States between 1840 and 1860. Most of the immigrants from the British Isles during this period were Irish. Immigrants arrived with a variety of occupations. Students will be asked to examine statistics and respond to questions. (See Appendix B)

### **Lesson Three: Immigrants in Cartoons**

While German and Irish immigrants both poured into America between 1840 and 1880, cartoonists far more frequently choose the Irish as their subjects. This preference reflected the fact that there were more Irish in the East where the cartoonists were, and also that they were more Catholic and vocal.

Before beginning this lesson, have the students sit down with a copy of the political cartoon. Encourage them to spend at least 10 minutes recording every detail that they can find in the cartoon. Students should: list the objects or people seen in the cartoon, identify the cartoon caption or title, locate words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon and record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon. Once each student has written everything they see, have them compare their observations with another student. Together, the students should combine their lists and prepare to present it to the class. Using an overhead projector, the teacher can record the classes' observations.

Teachers should then guide the students into a discussion of the political cartoon's captions, labels, objects, people, setting and underlying theme. What is the cartoonist's opinion of Irish Immigrants and their influence on America? (Appendix C-M)

## Appendix A

### Newspaper Clipping from *The Nation*, Dublin, January 22, 1848

#### STATE OF THE COUNTRY

Awful Cast of Starvation. \_\_\_ The condition of this portion of the country is truly lamentable. The misery of the people here is unparalleled-plague, pestilence, and famine, meet the eye in every direction, and the once happy and apparently comfortable village and neighborhood of Cloughjordan, have now almost become a second Skibbereen! The evidence adduced at the inquest upon the miserable youth who sank beneath the bitter pangs of famine, shows the wretched state into which the unfortunate people are plunged. The sworn testimony of the mother-oh! Unhappy, amine stricken mother-is enough to draw tears of pity and commiseration, even from bosoms of brass and hearts of flint! A turnip, she says, supplied her, by perhaps as needy neighbors, has been their chief, in fact their only sustenance for the last month. She further states that for the four days previous to the death of her son, the entire family were without any food whatever, when the biting gripe of hunger, and when nature had been completely exhausted, yielded his spirit to his God, and ceased to breathe the air of a land that had refused to him the common necessaries of life!

On Sunday, an inquest was held on the body in a filthy hut, which is situate on the road side, and within a mile of Cloughjordan. The interior of this awful abode of misery presented a most heart rendering spectacle. In a corner lay stretched on a litter of straw, in a state of nudity and utter helplessness, Timothy Quirke, aged 19 years, while his brother Thomas, who was about nine years old, was lying on his back close to the fire, which was composed of a sod of turf and a few sticks, which were given by the neighbors. The poor creature, whose skin was quite yellow, his limbs fleshless, and who was a wretched picture of extreme destitution, was unable to sit up or stand, such being the state of exhaustion to which he was reduced. On the floor stood trembling, and in an emaciated state, two other children, holding their unfortunate mother, Bridget Quirke, by the remnant of an old gown, and crying for food, which, alas! She had not to give them, and on a table was placed the body of the deceased, which was frightful to behold! In several places in the same vicinity similar scenes of misery exist.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> instant another inquest was held at Borrisokane, on the body of Mary McDermott. Her poverty-stricken father, who is a schoolmaster, declared on his oath that for a week previous to her death she could get nothing to eat; that he could not support his family in consequence of having only three poor scholars; and that his daughter, who was thirteen years of age, while expiring in his arms, as he gazed on her paled face and parched lips, was calling on him to give her a drink and to administer to her food, which he had not the means of procuring. Dr. Stoney examined the body of the deceased, and found she came by her death in consequence of the want of the proper necessaries of life.

The jury returned a verdict that the deceased died from extreme want. Such are the melancholy facts connected with the deaths of Quirke and McDermott – fellow creatures, young in years, consigned to their graves by starvation, and in a Christian Country! – *Nenagh Guardian*  
 (American Irish Historical Society, New York)

## Appendix B

### Some Occupations of Immigrants in New York, 1855

Occupations	Total Number of Workers	Foreign-Born Workers
Bakers	3,692	3,323
Blacksmiths	2,642	2,159
Leather Workers	1,386	980
Jewelers	1,705	1,037
Carpenters	7,531	4,863
Clerks	13,929	5,921
Shoemakers/Tailors	19,354	18,600
Domestic Servants	31,749	29,470
Merchants	6,299	1,705
Doctors	1,469	566

(Stuckey, *Call To Freedom*, p.458)

#### Discussion Questions:

- Which occupation had the highest number of immigrant workers in 1855? Why do you think such a large amount of immigrants chose this occupation?
- What specific skills would a person need in this occupation? Which occupations listed needed higher skill levels?

### Activity

- Imagine that you are living in New York in 1855. You are unemployed and have a family to take care of. You blame your unemployment situation on the new immigrants. Write a letter to the editor or draw a political cartoon expressing your views on immigration.

### Appendix C

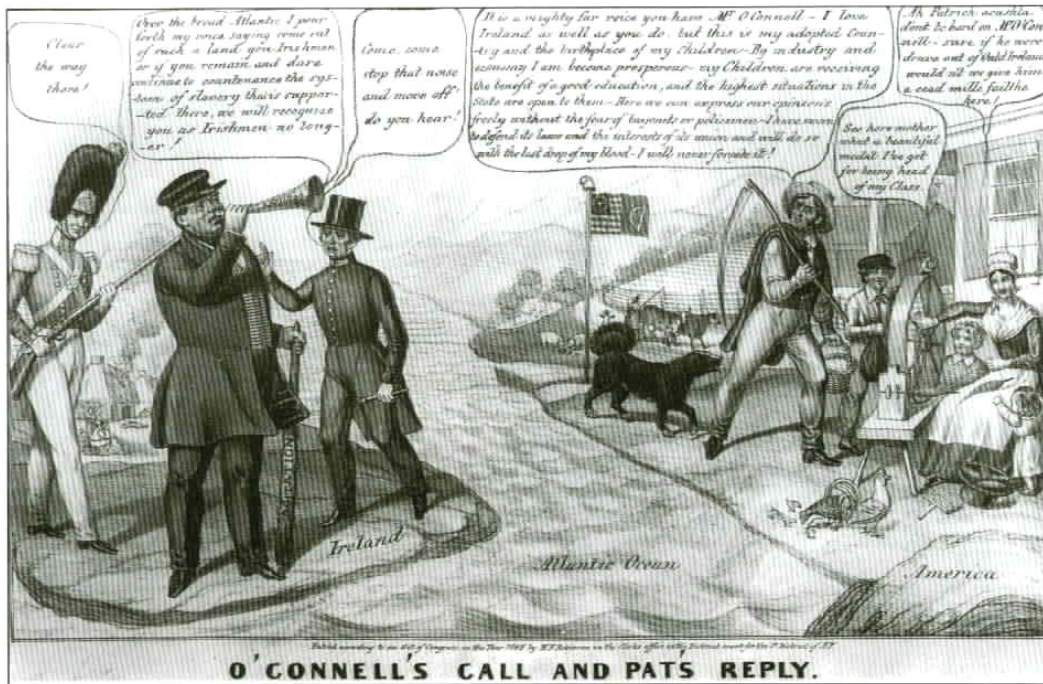
#### \*“Bog Trotters”



Nick Robinson Collection, National Museum of Ireland

\* “Bog Trotters” was an insulting name for Irish peasants. The term created the image of Irish peasants as carefree imbeciles. This depiction suggested that the bogtrotters danced, drank and were irresponsible

## Appendix D



Library of Congress

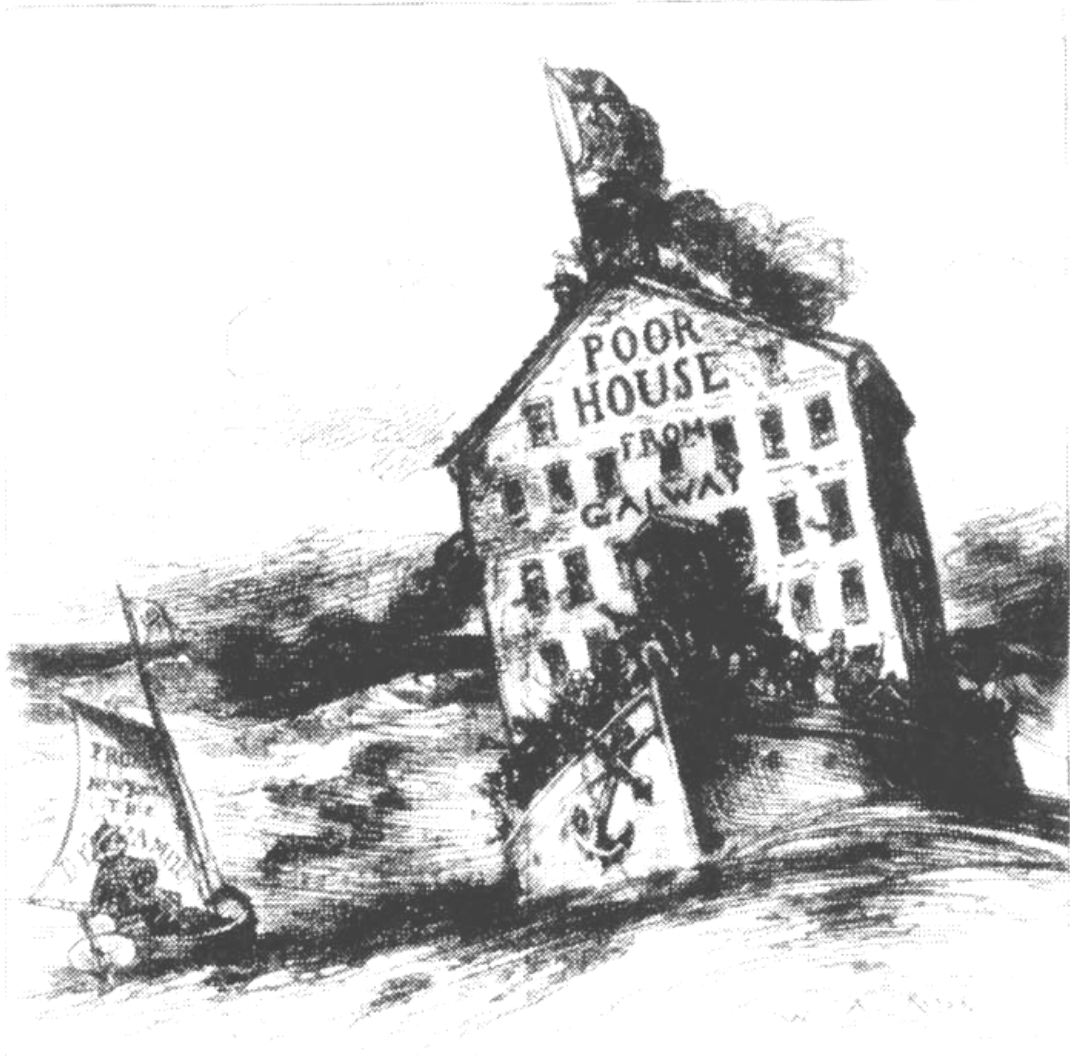
O'Connell, a nationalist leader, is trying to stir Irish immigrants in America to join the fight against slavery. How are the Irish immigrants being portrayed by E.R. Clay, the cartoonist?

**O'Connell:** Over the broad Atlantic I pour forth my voice saying come out of such a land you Irishmen or if you remain and dare continue to countenance the system of slavery that is supported there, we will recognize you as Irishmen no longer!

**Irishman:** It is a mighty far voice you have Mr. O'Connell – I love Ireland as well as you do, but this is my adopted country and the birthplace of my children. By industry and economy I am become prosperous – my Children are receiving the benefit of a good education, and the highest situations in the state are open to them – Here we can express our opinions freely without the fear of bayonets or policemen – I have sworn to defend its laws and the interests of its union and will do so with the last drop of my blood – I will never forsake it!

**Child:** See here mother what a beautiful medal I've got for being head of my class.

Appendix E



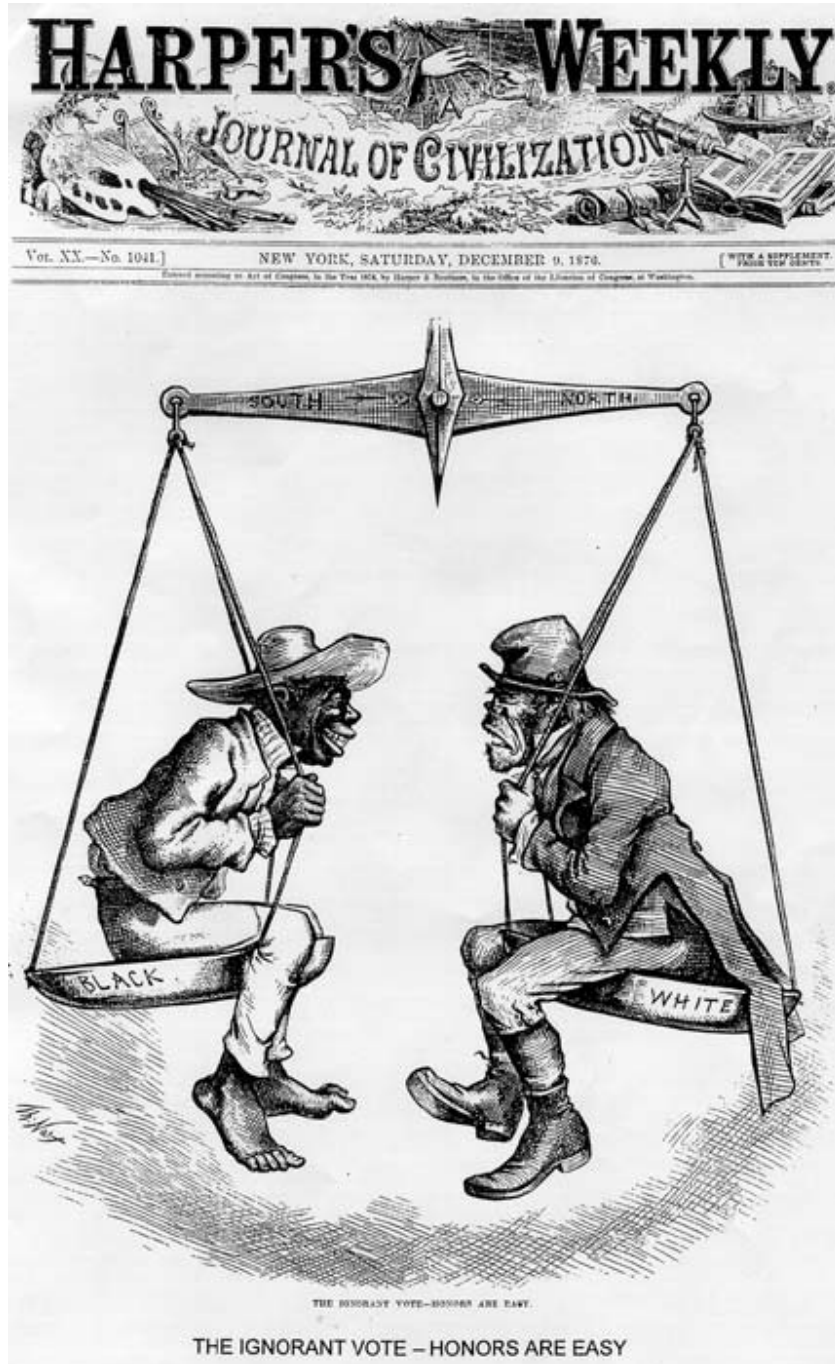
Rogers, W.A. "Poor House from Galway", *Harper's Weekly*

Appendix F



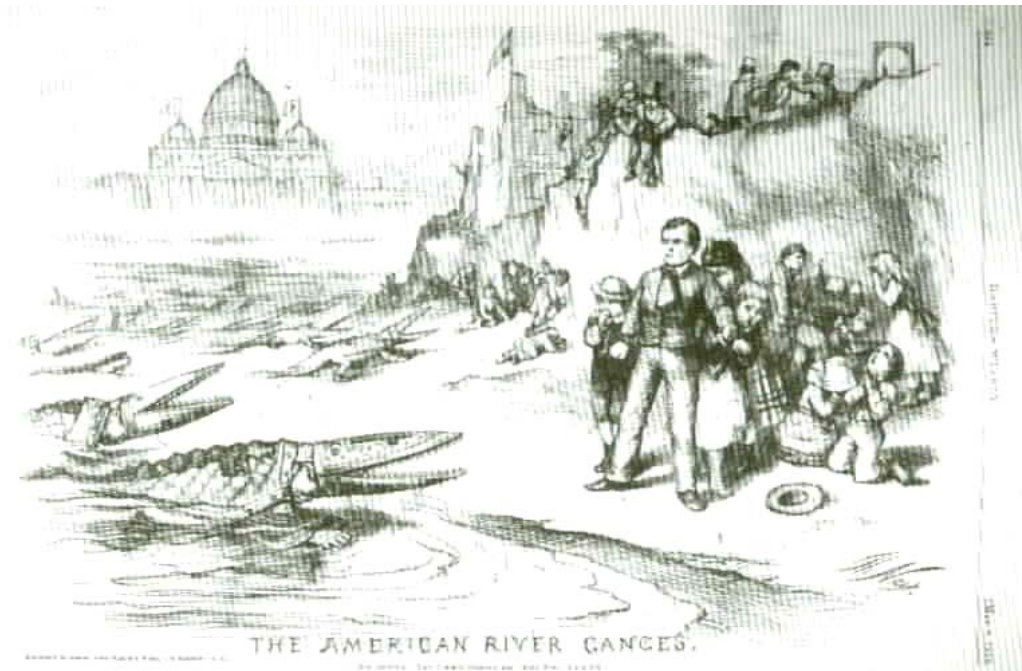
Nash, Thomas, *Harper's Weekly*

Appendix G



Nast, Thomas, "The Ignorant Vote—Honors are Easy", *Harper's Weekly*

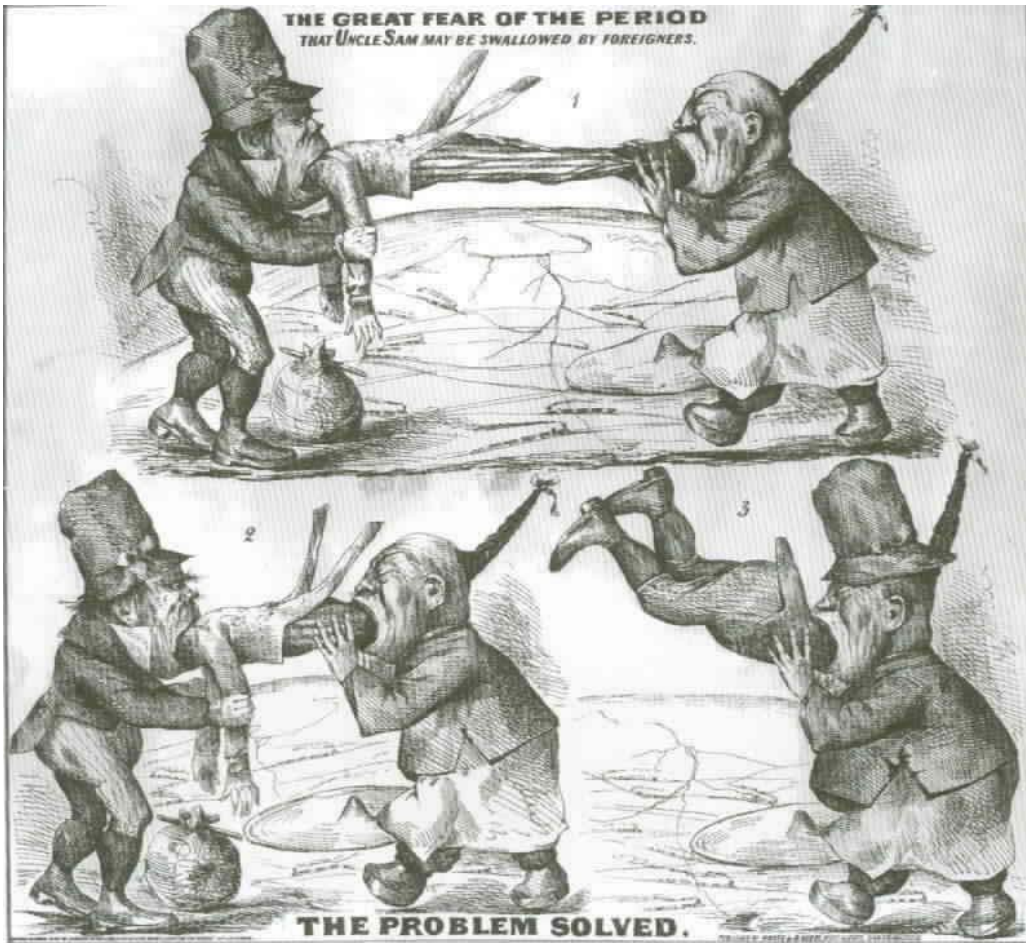
## Appendix H



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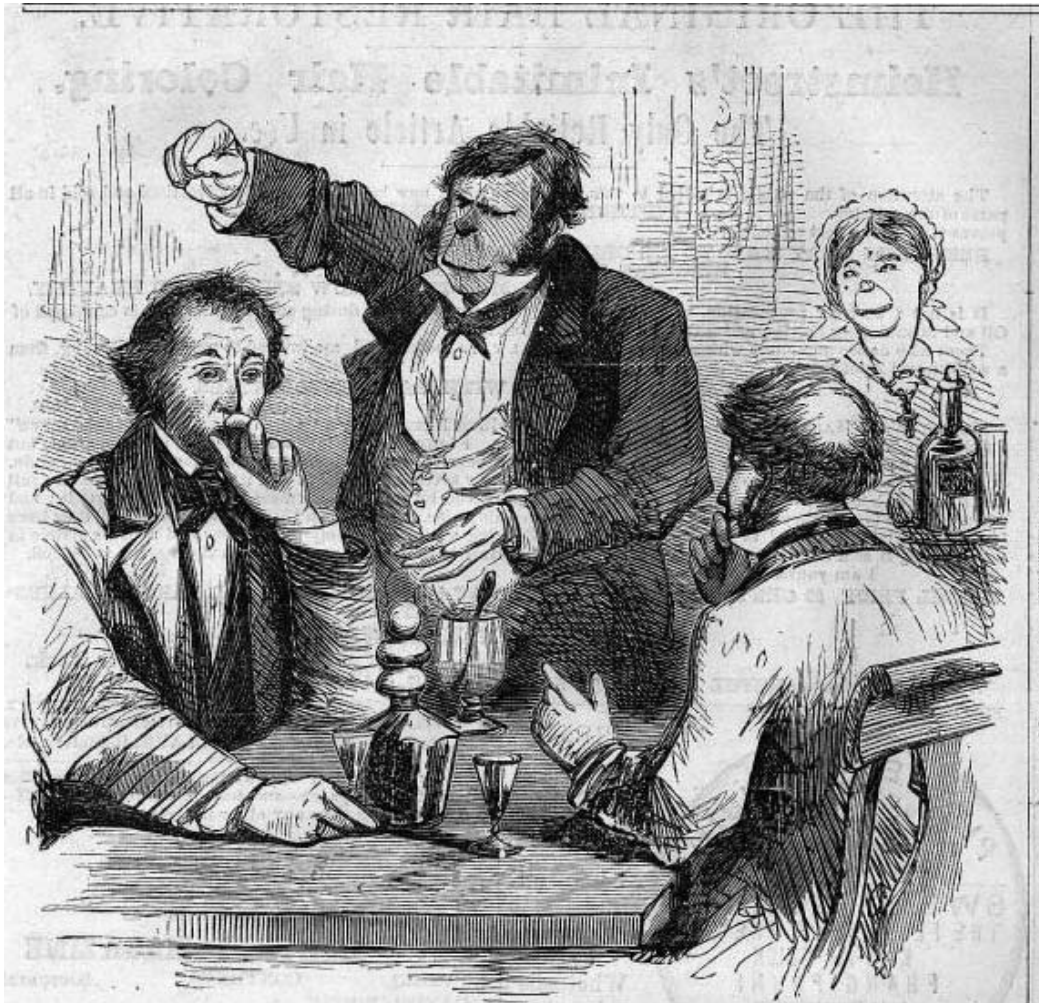
Cartoonist Thomas Nast, who was a German immigrant, favored minorities and immigrants, but was extremely anti-Catholic. Protestants and the Irish Catholics came into conflict over which Bible would be used in the school and the kind of religious instruction that would take place.

Appendix I



Library of Congress

Appendix J



**OUR EDUCATORS.**

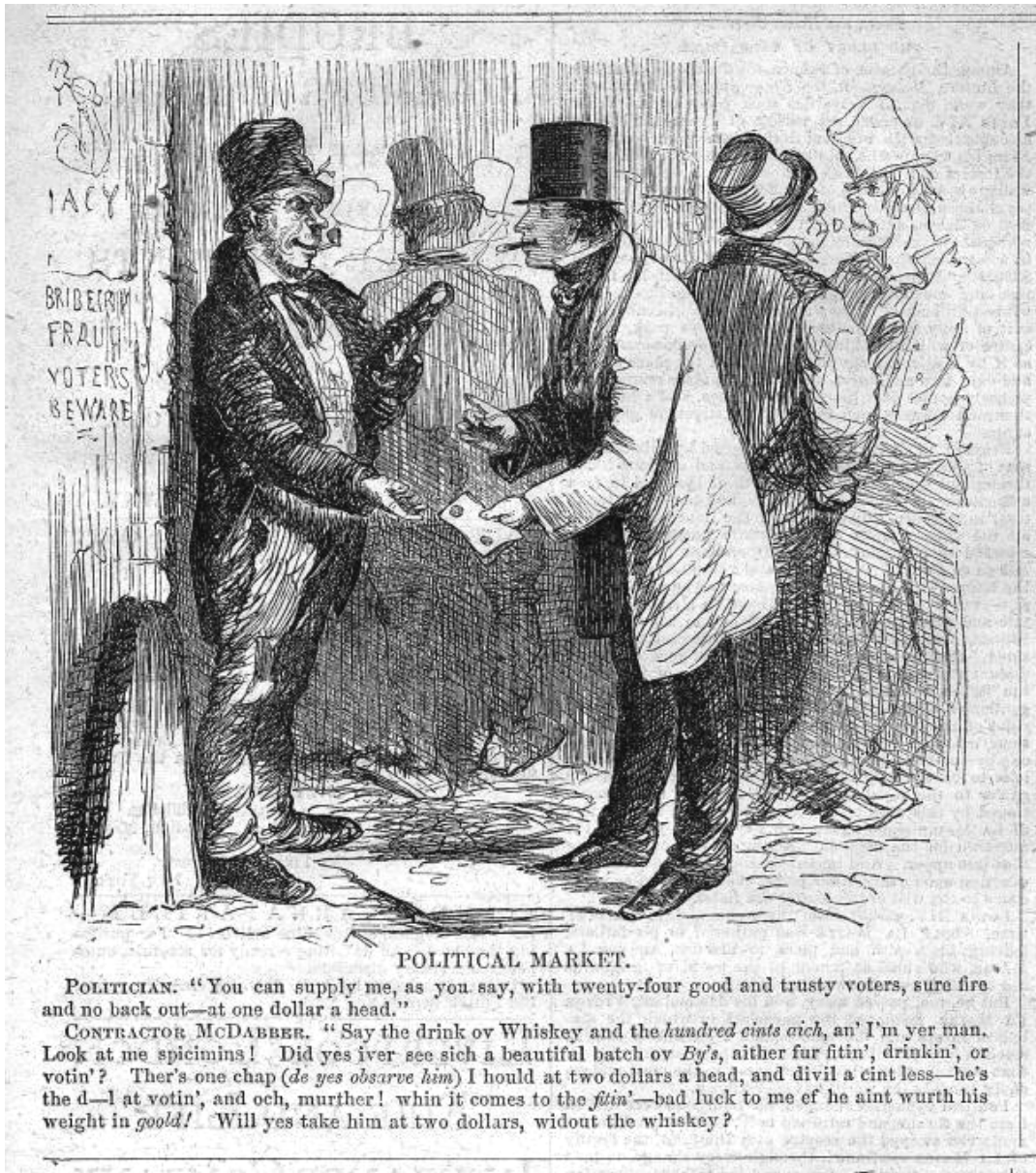
**THE READING OF THE BIBLE IN THE SCHOOLS.**

AMERICAN SCHOOL COMMISSIONER. "But, my good Sir, we have always read the Bible in our American Schools ever since the first settlement of the country."

IRISH SCHOOL COMMISSIONER. "Worse luck, thin; ye'll rade it no more! Father O'Flaherty says it interfares wid our holy religion, an' by the Vargin it won't and it shan't be read!"

*Harper's Weekly*

## Appendix K



*Harper's Weekly*

Appendix L



HERE

AND  
OR, EMIGRATION A REMEDY.

THERE;

*Library of Congress*

Appendix M



Nast, Thomas, *Harper's Weekly*

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**NOTES:**

Coffey, Michael, ed. The Irish in America, p. 7.

Coffey, Michael, ed. The Irish in America, p. 32.

Coffey, Michael, ed. The Irish in America, p. 46.

## **Content Standards**

### **Communications**

C1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.

C2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

C3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

C4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.

C5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.

C6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

C7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.

C8. All students compose and make oral presentations.

### **Citizenship**

CI1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations.

CI2. All students demonstrate an understanding of themes and patterns of geography and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic and cultural development.

CI3. All students describe the development and operations of economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States.

CI4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.

CI5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues, confronting the U.S. and other nations, conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.

CI7. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others.

CI8. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

CI9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the U.S. and other nations.