

FOR TEACHERS

Depending on the time available, the following can be used for in-class discussion or for written assignments. There are also suggestions for more involved research projects. The lessons are designed to serve as examples of how to use the Our Plural History Website with high school and college students. The lessons cover a range of topics and time periods, and will help students identify with the experiences of others similar to or different from themselves in order to develop a richer understanding of cultural diversity and the practice of pluralism in the United States. Students will also gain experience working with primary source materials.

The website is organized around themes arranged in chronological order. The Overview essays for each theme item introduce key concepts and subjects that reoccur throughout the website (cultural geography, conflict and cooperation between groups, resistance to newcomers, obstacles to and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility, the creation of and interaction among different communities, political mobilization, community and family life, etc.).

Students will be able to trace the development of a plural society over time, and to compare the experiences and contributions of diverse groups, noting both commonalities and contrasts. For example, the section devoted to the theme of Industrialization and Immigration includes essays on economic and technological change, sports, and the migration of African Americans to the city of Springfield, Massachusetts. There are also essays on the creation of distinctive immigrant communities and the challenges of assimilation. Polish, Greek, and Jewish immigrants faced similar difficulties in adjusting to life in the United States, but each group faced those challenges with its own particular set of cultural and communal resources. Moreover, industrialization, technological change and urbanization transformed American society and culture as a whole, shaping the lives of immigrants and the native-born alike. The modern sport of basketball, originating in Springfield, provided a distinctly “American” forum in which members of an increasingly multicultural society participated together.

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons, students will be able to:

- Describe the various aspects of culture
- Explain how culture imparts a sense of identity and community
- Compare and contrast the experiences of different ethnic and immigrant groups in the U.S.
- Discuss the meanings of “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” “assimilation” and “tolerance”
- Analyze the origins of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices
- Explain how different ethnic and cultural groups have contributed to the development of U.S. society, economy, politics and culture

Student Skills Developed in the following lesson plans include:

- Gathering and interpreting information
- Thinking critically about assumptions, implications and consequences
- Understanding different frames of reference and perspectives
- Analyzing particular and general effects
- Recognizing patterns of continuity and change over time
- Interpreting primary sources

LESSON 1

Everyone in the U.S. but the indigenous peoples came from somewhere else. Have students read essays from the following list, and then answer the questions below:

- William Pynchon
- Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad
- Polish immigrants
- Irish immigrants
- Italian immigrants
- Greek immigrants
- Jewish immigrants
- The Great Migration
- Hmong immigrants
- Puerto Rican migrants
- immigrants from Russia and the Soviet Union

- A. What drew immigrants and migrants to the Connecticut River Valley?
- B. What conditions, welcomes, or resistance did they encounter upon arrival in a new place?
- C. How are the experiences of later-arriving migrants/immigrants similar to or different from the experiences of earlier-arriving migrants/immigrants?

LESSON 2

Cultural geography considers how culture is linked to the ways that people organize themselves in a particular place, how ethnic groups situate themselves in relation to other groups, and how questions of national origin, language, religion and race shape the landscape. Have students read essays from the following list, and then answer the questions below:

- Geography of the Connecticut River Valley
- Pre-European Cultures
- Conflict and Cooperation among First Peoples and Europeans
- Abolitionism and the Underground Railroad
- Irish immigrants
- French-Canadian immigrants
- Greek immigrants
- Jewish immigrants
- The Great Migration
- Puerto Rican migrants
- immigrants from Russia and the Soviet Union

- A. How have human cultures been shaped by the physical environment? How have people changed the landscape or physical environment?
- B. Where did different ethnic communities and immigrant groups settle in the Connecticut River Valley? What made certain locations inviting? Were some places off-limits to certain groups? Where do new groups go when they come here?
- C. Which factors help immigrants create new communities away from their homeland? Is it a matter of location, particular gathering places, cultural traits, or economic resources?
- D. How do identifiably ethnic neighborhoods change identities over time, or last from generation to generation? How do cultural landscapes overlap and interact?

LESSON 3

The experience of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups in American economic life is broad and varied. Technological developments and industrialization opened the door to new opportunities but also displaced and divided communities and towns. The establishment of ethnic neighborhoods and enclaves allowed many to open businesses that primarily served local communities and sometimes became de facto meeting places and community centers. Have students read essays from the following list, and then answer the questions below:

- William Pynchon
- John Pynchon
- Indenture Servants
- Thomas Thomas
- Primus Mason
- Industry and Innovation
- Springfield Armory
- Polish immigrants
- Irish immigrants
- French-Canadian immigrants
- Italian immigrants
- German immigrants
- Jewish immigrants
- The Great Migration
- Puerto Rican migrants

- A. How do ethnic, racial or religious factors influence who participates in the economic life of the city or community? How do ethnic, racial or religious factors influence the kinds of opportunities available to individuals?
- B. How did industrialization and technological change produce divisions between cultural groups in the United States? How does economic life bring together people of different cultural backgrounds?

LESSON 4

The history of the U.S. reveals a tension between America's dedication to universal principles of freedom and democracy and the sense that "Americanism" must be defended against alien influences. The coexistence of many different cultural communities in the United States is heralded by some as a triumph for tolerance and an illustration of American exceptionalism. Our diversity is our strength. Others argue that the preservation and promotion of ethnic and cultural differences weakens the bonds that hold a nation together.

Many argue that Americans are bound together by a common belief in the "American Creed": a faith in liberty, the rule of law, democracy, individualism, and cultural and political egalitarianism. Yet, belief in the Creed has always coexisted with nativism and racial antipathy. Along with Social Darwinism—the idea that the members of some cultural groups are superior to members of other groups—Americans also practice pluralism—the development of and a commitment to the values of toleration, with everyone working towards respecting differences and overcoming prejudice and discrimination based upon ignorance and stereotypes. Have students read essays from the following list, and then answer the questions below:

- King Philip’s War
- Conflict and Cooperation among First Peoples and Europeans
- William Pynchon
- John Brown
- Thomas Thomas
- Springfield and the Civil War
- Reverend Samuel Osgood
- Polish immigrants
- Irish immigrants
- French Canadian immigrants
- Italian immigrants
- German immigrants
- Basketball
- Civil Rights Movement
- Puerto Rican migrants

- A. How have racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants been defined at various times in opposition to “American” identity?
- B. What are the particular sources of conflict between cultural groups? Do the sources and types of conflicts change over time?
- C. Around what common interests do groups find cooperation mutually beneficial? What activities, customs or endeavors encourage cooperation among groups?
- D. What kinds of cultural differences have been hardest to overcome?

RESEARCH PROJECTS

The following sets of questions can form the basis for more in-depth classroom discussions or research projects. Students and instructors may incorporate their own resources in addition to the material on the website.

1. Contemporary approaches for dealing with diversity include interfaith dialogue, multiculturalism in the workplace and the racial integration of public schools. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?
2. What constitutes the American Dream? Has it changed over time? How is one’s definition of and access to the American Dream determined by race, ethnicity, social class and/or religion? What is the future of the American Dream in the 21st century?
3. How do people acquire their visions of race, ethnicity, and religion in others? How are the different cultural aspects of individual identity formed or constructed?
4. What role does family culture play in accounting for the relative success of different ethnic, racial and religious groups in adapting to American society? What are the distinguishing characteristics of family systems prior to assimilation? How does family culture and structure facilitate or impede assimilation? How has assimilation reshaped family culture?