

# The irish plight



I have a close bond to the plight of the Irish in this country due to my Irish heritage. In today's society, being Irish has a different meaning than in the 1830s through the 1960s. Previous to the 1830s, many Irish immigrants were skilled young men seeking a better life. Because of the potato famine that lasted from 1845-1851, the Irish immigrants were then unskilled, uneducated, poor, Catholic farmers.

During that time, at least one and a half million Irish men and women immigrated to the United States (Rapple, 2011). Due to public fear of Catholicism and unique dialect of the Irish, stereotypes, and prejudices were formed. Because of the distinct dialect, the Irish were easily distinguished from other races, and due to poverty and illiteracy, most Irish were restricted to living within poverty-stricken neighborhoods forming segregation from other races (Kinsella, 2011). Instead of wallowing in grief, Irish neighborhoods would band together and improve themselves. They did this by building schools and churches all funded from within the Irish communities. Faced with prejudice, racism, segregation, a dual labor market, institutional discrimination, and a glass ceiling the Irish overcame all odds and completed assimilation into the white race. The segregation of the Irish immigrant due to mostly poverty, it had many Irish men and women living in basements, cellars, and small apartments with inadequate light and ventilation.

These living arrangements would often be flooded with sewage. Due to the deplorable living conditions, many Irish immigrants contracted Cholera, Yellow Fever, Typhus, Tuberculosis, and pneumonia (Kenny, 2008). Many

Irish immigrants, also succumbed to alcohol abuse or mental illness, and living in those conditions who could blame them.

Fact of the matter is, in 1855 20 percent of the Irish worked as unskilled laborers. This might sound all right, until one learns the fact that in 1855 only three percent of other immigrant groups worked as unskilled laborers, thus proving the fact that the Irish suffered under a dual labor market. According to the First amendment of the United States Constitution, ??? Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

??? There for this country was founded on basic principle of freedom of religion. However, when the Irish Catholics began to arrive, they were met with fear and loathing due to the misconception that Irish Catholics were beholden to their priest. Many examples could be listed of the angry Anti-Catholicism acts throughout the 1800s. One example of this when an Irish Catholic Ursuline Convent in Charleston, Massachusetts, was burned down by a mob in 1834. In addition, 10 years later outside of Philadelphia, because of a dispute of which Bible to use in public schools, riots burned down two Catholic churches. The Order of the Star-Spangled Banner emerged with members pledging their support to only native-born Protestants for public office.

Some of the orders other agenda items were to fight the Roman Catholic Church and to force a 21-year waiting-period for naturalization. When unable

to do that they passed legislations restricting immigrants from voting before 21 years in this country, seven long years after the immigrants had become US citizens. This order became the American party, whenever asked about their anti-immigration policies all would reply, "I know nothing," later earning them the nickname the Know-Nothings (Taylor, 2010). A remarkable feat in a country whose very first amendment ratified in 1791, gives everyone the right to freedom of religion (Mount, 2001). Irish men and women for the most part were poor, and uneducated in the 1800.

With only unskilled labor jobs that paid low wages most Irish immigrants were considered sub-human, and feared the black man's freedom from slavery would cost them the jobs that were available. Black slaves were the people who first to call the Irish "white niggers," a feeling of hate raged between the two races for many years. Living in poverty, uneducated, hated because of class, the Irish suffered from institutional discrimination. Due to the fact that most Irish men and women in the 1800 were uneducated, many were unable to advance in any job, causing a glass ceiling for the race for many years. Although by the late 1800s, the uneducated became educated, opening new jobs and avenues for Irish workers.

As an example, Irish-born William Kingsly was the contractor overseeing the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. Irish workforce was the backbone of most construction projects in the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, in essence the Irish built the wonders of the country (The American Immigration Law Foundation, 2011). The Irish assimilated into American society but never gave up their religion, or beliefs. A strong bond to their Irish heritage and stouthearted people, they were accepted into American

society on their own terms. Full acceptance of the Irish-Catholic came with the election of President J.

F. Kennedy in 1960 (Kenny, 2008). However, now because of the color of their skin the Irish American is now being held to the same standard as any other ??? white.??? Affirmative Action is now placing the Irish American in the same category as those whose ancestors oppressed the Irish ancestors (Elroy, 2002) The Irish, who are still a strong race will overcome all obstacles to once again land on solid ground. The Irish American race is and will continue to be a strong culture within the American society with many accomplishments to be admired. Rappaport, B. ??? Irish Americans???.

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