Irish laborers in the united states

Sociology, Immigration

" Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. " These are the three crucial God given rights that serve as the foundation of the United States of America, and that set the nation apart from most others. Following the Revolutionary War, countless immigrants made their way to the United States in hopes of having the freedoms and opportunities of the American people.

The Irish were amongst these immigrants, having fled their homeland in the 1800s to seek refuge. The Irish began slowly immigrating to America as early as the 1700s, but those statistics seem almost minuscule in comparison to the nearly two million refugees that immigrated following 1845. This was due to the Irish Potato Famine, commonly known as " The Great Famine". During this time, a fungal disease spread across the country, turning potato crops to indelible mush. The potato was a staple for the Irish people for many reasons; not only was it nutritious and dense in calories, but it was inexpensive as well. When the famine struck, it had severe effects not only on the tenant farmers who relied on potatoes for income, but for the rest of the country who fed off them as well. Poor, starving, and desperate were the Irish as they boarded the packed cargo ships, crammed together for the four week journey to the United States. Little did they know those four weeks were about to be possibly some of the toughest weeks of their lives. The ships were inadequately supplied for the voyage ahead, lacking necessities such as food and water. There were no designated areas to defecate, forcing the Irish to live and sleep amongst their own vomit and feces. Thousands were unable to survive, and many of those who did arrived weak and ill. The Irish immigrants were unskilled, uneducated, and spoke very little english which made finding work difficult. This forced them to settle for the lowly

jobs no one else wanted, working lengthy hours for meager pay. Most Irish women found jobs as house servants, cooks, or sometimes in factories as well. The men found jobs as laborers, working on construction projects or mining coal. Despite their lack of skill and communication, the Irishmen significantly contributed to the infrastructure of the northeastern United States. They are responsible for the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Erie Canal, as well as many other the historical architectures that still stand today.

Although the Irish laborers greatly contributed to the infrastructure of the United States, they still faced prejudice and bigotry in their new homeland. Many of America's early settlers followed the Protestant or Presbyterian churches, whereas the Irish were predominantly Roman Catholic. These early settlers believed the United States of America was the land of " Temperance, Liberty, and Protestantism", and felt that the Irish immigrants were defiling the nation. This created severe tension and animosity between them which inevitably led to violence. Many Protestant men joined gang-like fraternities, united by their hatred for the Irish immigrants and for their Roman Catholic faith as well. They felt it was their duty to restore the country to its pre-existing state, and strived to achieve this through acts of terrorism. Catholic Churches and homes were vandalized and burned to the ground. Catholic priests were being beaten, injured, sometimes even " tarred and feathered". Rallies had turned to riots.