

Immigration to Iowa

What would compel people to move to a new place?

Iowa has been the destination for immigrants since it began welcoming settlers in the 1830s. The origins of those new arrivals changed significantly over the past 175 years and can be roughly divided into three waves. In each case, they came in response to a combination of “push/pull” factors. Push factors like wars or persecution at home or poverty and lack of economic prospects forced them to seek a new homeland. Pull factors included the advantages they saw in relocating in Iowa. The rich farmland and economic opportunities were the major factor in early Iowa.

Iowa’s Early Settlers

Following the Black Hawk War when Native Americans were pressured to relinquish title to a significant portion of eastern Iowa, pioneers headed for the “land across the river.” Most early settlers were attracted by the acres of cheap government land. Small farmers from the Ohio River Valley furnished a large share of the early population. The states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri were stopping points along the way for many families who had begun in New England or the states of the upper South like Virginia, Maryland or Kentucky.

European Boom

Europe also began its contribution to the Iowa scene. Political revolutions and repressive reactions swept central Europe in the late 1840s. Germany supplied the largest contingent, with a tidal wave following failed revolutions in 1848. Many Germans settled in the Mississippi River towns like Dubuque and Davenport where they formed strong ethnic communities. However, Germans were a sizable presence in many Iowa communities and rural neighborhoods. The potato famines of the 1840s forced many Irish families to seek a new home in America, promoting Ireland as the second largest source of early European immigrants. Great Britain, Canada, Holland and the Scandinavian countries also contributed residents to early Iowa. Railroads and the state itself promoted foreign immigration. They developed and distributed brochures throughout northern and western Europe in native languages describing the climate, economic prospects and practical information on how to reach Iowa.

In the late 1800s and until World War I, immigrants from Italy, Russia and Eastern Europe began showing up in the census. Because most of the land was now privately owned and no longer available at cheap prices from the government, it was early Iowa industries that attracted these new arrivals. Coal mining was important in drawing Italians and Croatians. Often a single male would arrive and get a job in a coal mine. When he had saved enough, he would sponsor a brother, son or nephew who would then also contribute to the migration costs of other family members. World War I fostered distrust of these later immigrants and efforts were made to “Americanize” them and to limit the numbers of future arrivals. Mexican immigration also increased with the demand for farm labor during the war.

Refugees

Beginning in the 1970s, a third wave of immigrants began to enter the state and this immigration continues today. These individuals were often the victims of civil wars or natural disasters. The Vietnam War created thousands of displaced persons confined in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. In 1975, President Gerald Ford urged the nation to help to resettle refugees here, and Iowa’s Governor Robert Ray responded by setting up a state agency to work with private organizations. As a result, many Vietnamese arrived in the state, learned English and became productive citizens. Wars in their homelands also “pushed” Bosnians, Ethiopians and others from Africa and Asia to seek new homes in Iowa. Hispanics from Mexico, South America and the Caribbean were drawn here by work in Iowa’s meatpacking plants and became a significant segment of the population in several Iowa communities including Perry, Storm Lake, Marshalltown and Denison. Iowa boasts several nationally-recognized museums that pay tribute to Iowa immigrant groups: Vesterheim for Norwegians in Decorah; The Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids; the German Heritage Center in Davenport; and the Danish Museum of America in Elk Horn.

Supporting Questions

Why do people move or choose to immigrate?

- [Sivell Family Passengers' Contract Ticket, 1852 \(Document\)](#)
- [Sivell Ship's Manifest, 1852 \(Document\)](#)
- [The Great Bartholdi Statue, 1885 \(Image\)](#)
- [Statistical Atlas of the United States' Population, 1898 \(Map\)](#)
- [Emigrants coming to the "Land of Promise," 1902 \(Image\)](#)
- [Railroad Workers in Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1920 \(Image\)](#)
- ["What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?" 2003 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Get The Facts: Refugee Resettlement in Iowa," 2018 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Definition of a Refugee" from Iowa PBS, 2007 \(Video\)](#)

What did refugees and immigrants experience when they arrived in America?

- [Inspection Room, Ellis Island, New York, between 1900 and 1915 \(Image\)](#)
- [Emigrants \[i.e. immigrants\] Landing at Ellis Island, 1903 \(Video\)](#)
- [Immigration Figures for the United States, 1903 \(Document\)](#)
- [Immigrants' Landing at Ellis Island, between 1910 and 1920 \(Image\)](#)
- [Language Proclamation Concern Letter, June 6, 1918 \(Document\)](#)
- [Revocation of Babel Proclamation, 1918 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Strong Ties" Article from The Goldfinch, April 1991 \(Document\)](#)
- [Mario Ruiz Ronquillo Interview about Mexican Immigration and Workplace Culture in the Midwest, December 4, 2015 \(Audio\)](#)
- ["Immigrant group works to help newcomers integrate in America" Newspaper Article, March 29, 2015 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Refugee from Congo speaks of challenges in Iowa City" Newspaper Article, August 17, 2016 \(Document\)](#)

How does one's culture influence where they choose to live?

- [Sokol Festival, July 4-6, 1911 \(Image\)](#)
- [Sauerkraut Day, September 7, 1912 \(Image\)](#)
- [Wedding of Cruz and Esperanza Martinez in Kansas, 1920 \(Image\)](#)
- [Celebrating Mexican Independence Day in Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1926 \(Image\)](#)
- [Italian Immigrants in Iowa, April 15, 1942 \(Image\)](#)
- [Sudanese Immigrants in Iowa, late 1990s \(Image\)](#)
- ["Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?" 2003 \(Document\)](#)

[*Printable Image and Document Guide](#)

Additional Resources

*Links to additional resources available in the [Immigration to Iowa Primary Source Set](#).

Stories of Midwest Migration

Drawing on historical material from cultural organizations across the Midwest, this digital exhibit from Chicago's Newberry Library presents representative stories of the many migrations that have transformed the Midwest—and continue to do so to this day.

The Goldfinch: Iowa History for Young People (Volume 12, Number 4, April 1991)

This Iowa history magazine for children was published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Iowa from 1975-2000. Each issue focuses on a theme and this particular volume highlighted immigration in Iowa and included articles, games, photos and fiction.

Alicia Ostriker reads Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus"

Poet and professor Alicia Ostriker reads the poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus as a donation to an auction of art and literary works intended to raise money to build a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. According to Ostriker, Lazarus was initially not interested in contributing a poem, but "a friend convinced her that the statue would be of great significance to immigrants sailing into the harbor."

Immigration: Stories of Yesterday and Today

This online toolkit allows students to experience the process of immigration to America through the eyes of an immigrant. Students can take a tour of Ellis Island, explore an interactive immigration timeline and meet young immigrants through this online resource.

Civics Test (2016)

This document is the "Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test," and is an oral exam that an USCIS officer will ask the applicant up to 10 of the 100 civics questions. Applicants must answer 6 out of 10 questions correctly to pass the civics portion of the naturalization test.

Iowa Pathways: Oral History Videos

The media artifacts of this collection include videos and information about different groups of immigrants coming to Iowa, such as Jewish, Dutch and German settlers.

Escaping to America by Rosalyn Schanzer

This book, written for children 8 to 12, is Rosalyn Schanzer recounting how her father traveled with his family in 1921 from Sochocin, Poland, to the United States. His family left Poland under rising violence against and persecution of Poland's Jewish population.

How People Immigrate by Sarah De Capua

A civic book targeted as the elementary grade level that includes information about American history, government and politics.

At Ellis Island: A History In Many Voices by Louise Peacock

The book follows the journey of different immigrants and their families as they recount their travels, struggles and wonders of coming to America.

I Pledge Allegiance by Pat Mora & Libby Martinez

This children's book follows Libby's great aunt, Lobo, who is from Mexico. Lobo called the United States her home for many years, and she wants to become a U.S. citizen. At the end of the week, Lobo says the Pledge of Allegiance at a special ceremony. Libby is also learning the Pledge of Allegiance and she and Lobo practice together.

Sivell Family Passengers' Contract Ticket, August 20, 1852



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 20 August 1852

Description

The passengers' contract ticket highlights how the John Sivell family immigrated to the United States from the United Kingdom in 1852 aboard the ship, "Margaret Evans." The ticket references names, ages and food and water accommodations that will be given while in steerage. This ticket is dated Aug. 20, with a total cost of \$48.15. The Sivell family came to the U.S. as part of the British Emigrants' Mutual Aid Society and settled in Cedar Township, Lee County, Iowa, in a community that became known as "The English Colony." John Sivell continued the craft of boot making in the U.S. and also farmed and served as postmaster. Most male members of the British Emigrants' Mutual Aid Society were skilled laborers and artisans, and they were affiliated with the Chartist movement in England.

[Transcript of Passengers' Contract Ticket](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What was the cost for this family to come to America? Use the [inflation calculator](#) to compare it to an estimated cost of the trip today.
- How many people were traveling in the Sivell family? What would they need to consider when packing for the trip?
- Why would extended families move together?

Sivell Ship's Manifest, 1852

Courtesy of Ancestry.com, New York : Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 for John Sivell

Description

This ship's manifest shows names, ages, gender, ports, country origins and ethnicity of passengers. The Sivell family is listed on the manifest from 1852.

[Transcript of Sivell Ship's Manifest](#)

Source-Dependent Question

- Look at the other people that traveled on the same ship as the Sivell family. What do all the people have in common, and what differentiates the families based on what is listed in the manifest?

Citation Information

Courtesy of Ancestry.com, New York : Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 for John Sivell

The Great Bartholdi Statue, Liberty Enlightening the World: The Gift of France to the American People, 1885



Courtesy of Library of Congress, New York : Published by Currier & Ives, 1885

Description

The Great Bartholdi Statue, Liberty Enlightening the World: The Gift of France to the American People was erected on Bedloe's Island in New York Harbor.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Emma Lazarus wrote this poem, which was engraved on the Statue of Liberty monument in 1903. If you were an immigrant, what do you think of her message?

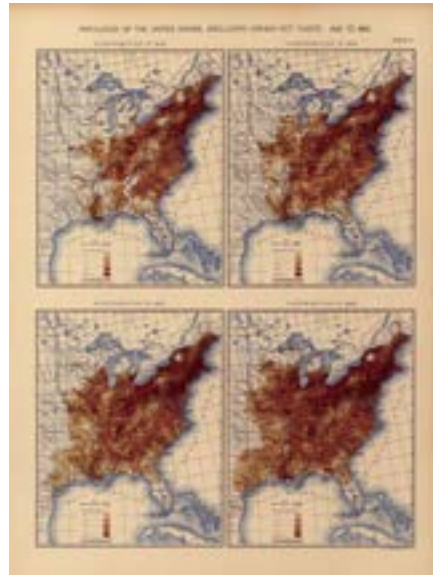
*"Give me your tired, you poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

- How is the Statue of Liberty a symbol of immigration?

Citation Information

"The Great Bartholdi Statue, Liberty Enlightening the World: The Gift of France to the American People," New York: Published by Currier & Ives, 1885. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Statistical Atlas of the United States' Population (excluding Indians not taxed), 1898



Courtesy of Library of Congress, United States Census Office, 11th Census (1890), and Henry Gannett, Washington, 1898

Description

A statistical atlas of the United States is based upon the results of the 11th census, completed in 1890, showing the population of the U.S. in 1830 and 1860. The atlas does not include the population of Native Americans who were not taxed.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Where was the greatest population found in the U.S. from 1830 and 1860?
- What changes happened regarding population from 1830 to 1860?
- What may have caused these changes?

Citation Information

United States Census Office, 11th Census (1890), and Henry Gannett. *Statistical atlas of the United States, based upon the results of the eleventh census*. Washington, 1898. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Emigrants coming to the "Land of Promise," 1902



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Rau, William H., 1902

Description

The 1902 photograph captures emigrants huddled together on their journey to the United States. The image was taken by American photographer William Herman Rau.

Source-Dependent Question

- Compare this image to the ["Sivell Family Passengers' Contract Ticket."](#) What do you notice in this image that relates to the Sivell family passengers' contract ticket description?

Citation Information

"Emigrants coming to the 'Land of Promise,'" Rau, William H., 1902. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Railroad Workers in Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1920



Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives, "Railroad workers employed by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in Fort Madison, Iowa, 1920s," Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1920

Description

This photograph shows Latino railroad workers employed by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in Fort Madison, Iowa, in the 1920s. The first Mexican people to settle in Iowa worked as *traqueros* (railroad track workers) who repaired and laid tracks on railroad section gangs, in foundries and factories, and as *betabeleros* (sugar beet workers). Many families followed a process of step migration, working first in Texas farm fields, Oklahoma coal mines or Kansas railroad yards before making their way into Iowa. Some came directly to Iowa, recruited by agricultural employers and the Santa Fe and Rock Island railroad companies. As employment opportunities and living arrangements became more secure, they returned to Mexico to bring additional family members to join them. They followed the same process of chain migration pursued by generations of immigrants the world over.

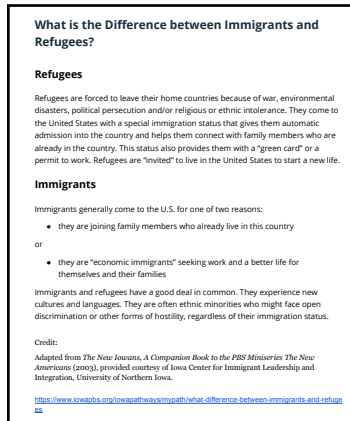
Source-Dependent Questions

- What pull factors brought the first people to Iowa from Mexico?
- Why did they return home?

Citation Information

"Railroad workers employed by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in Fort Madison, Iowa, 1920s," Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1920. [Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives](#)

“What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?” 2003



Courtesy of Iowa PBS, “What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?” *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans*, Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa, 2003

Description

This adapted document explains some of the differences that separate immigrants from refugees. The document content was adapted from *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans* that was published in 2003.

[Transcript of “What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees”](#)

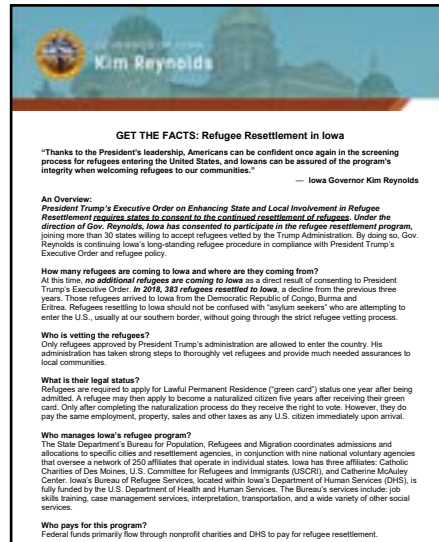
Source-Dependent Questions

- How does Iowa provide an opportunity for thousands of newcomers to live their version of the American dream?
- Why do immigrants and refugees come to Iowa?

Citation Information

“What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?” *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans*, Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa, 2003. [Courtesy of Iowa PBS](#)

“Get The Facts: Refugee Resettlement in Iowa”



Courtesy of State of Iowa, "Get The Facts: Refugee Resettlement in Iowa," 2018

Description

This document was distributed by Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds administration in regard to the state's refugee resettlement. Under former President Donald Trump, there was an executive order that required states to consent to the continued resettlement of refugees. Reynolds consented to participate in the refugee resettlement program and joined more than 30 other states. Iowa has a long-standing history of supporting refugee resettlement in the United States.

[Transcript of "Get The Facts: Refugee Resettlement in Iowa"](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How many refugees are coming to Iowa and where are they coming from?
- Who manages Iowa's refugee resettlement program?

Citation Information

"Get The Facts: Refugee Resettlement in Iowa," 2018. [Courtesy of State of Iowa](#)

“Definition of a Refugee” from Iowa PBS, 2007



Courtesy of Iowa PBS, “Definition of a Refugee,” *A Promise Called Iowa*, Iowa PBS, 2007

Description

In this video from Iowa PBS, Wayne Joshnon, former Chief of the Bureau of Refugee Services in Iowa, defines the term “refugee.”

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the legal definition of the term “refugee,” according to Wayne Joshnon?
- How do people gain the legal status of refugee in the United States, what is the process like?

Citation Information

“Definition of a Refugee,” *A Promise Called Iowa*, Iowa PBS, 2007. [Courtesy of Iowa PBS](#)

Inspection Room, Ellis Island, New York, between 1900 and 1915



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Detroit Publishing Co., between 1900 and 1915

Description

The inspection room was where new arrivals waited to be inspected and registered by immigration service officers. On many days, over 5,000 people would file through the space to undergo medical and legal examinations.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Why are American flags prominently placed in the inspection room?
- How is the inspection room physically structured in a way to aid in processing new immigrants?

Citation Information

"Inspection room, Ellis Island, New York, N.Y.," Detroit Publishing Company, between 1900 and 1915. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Emigrants [i.e. immigrants] Landing at Ellis Island, 1903



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Abadie, Alfred C., United States: Thomas A. Edison, Inc, 1903

Description

"Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island," a contemporary Edison film, shows a large open barge loaded with people of many nationalities, who just arrived from Europe. The immigrants are disembarking at Ellis Island in New York. The film opens with a view of the steam ferryboat "William Myers," laden with passengers, approaching a dock at the Ellis Island Immigration Station. The vessel is docked, the gangway is placed and the immigrant passengers are seen coming up the gangway and onto the dock, where they cross in front of the camera.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do you notice about the people disembarking from the ship? What objects did immigrants bring with them?
- If you were to leave your home and travel to a new country with only the items you could carry, what would you bring?

Citation Information

Abadie, Alfred C., "Emigrants [i.e. immigrants] landing at Ellis Island," United States: Thomas A. Edison, Inc., 1903.
[Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Immigration Figures for the United States, 1903

ILLITERACY.

Number of persons in each headed immigrants over fourteen years of age who cannot write or cannot read and write their own language, from those races (not natives) which contributed upwards of 1,000 immigrants to the United States during any of the past four fiscal years:

	1901	1902	1903	1904
Western Races.				
Scandinavian	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.8
Scottish	—	1.8	1.8	1.8
Russian and Mexican	3.0	1.5	1.6	1.6
English	6.2	1.8	1.6	1.6
Irish	3.3	3.0	3.0	3.8
French	3.7	3.3	1.4	3.2
German	3.0	3.0	4.8	3.8
German	5.8	4.1	3.4	4.8
Dutch and Flemish	9.6	7.8	7.8	6.0
Italian (North)	11.3	11.7	14.4	11.7
Average of above	4.2	3.0	4.4	3.9
Eastern Races (from Asia and Pacific).				
Spanish	—	—	—	8.0
Magyar	16.8	7.5	13.5	10.5
Rumanian	—	—	18.2	11.5
Slovak	17.0	18.7	19.0	11.8
Czech	11.1	15.0	18.0	17.7
Russian	—	—	—	14.0
Polish	21.0	17.5	28.4	28.1
Croatian and Slovenian	17.4	16.7	18.1	15.0
Bulgarian, Serbian, Montenegrin	—	—	—	11.7
Lithuanian	11.7	10.8	16.1	15.5
Belgian	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Italian (South)	14.6	10.1	18.4	17.6
Portuguese	10.0	10.8	15.8	12.0
Average of above	10.8	10.0	14.0	10.7
Other Races.				
Chinese	6.8	—	8.0	4.0
Chinese	—	—	8.0	11.0
Hawaiian	11.0	12.5	15.5	15.5
Japanese	8.0	6.7	1.0	11.0
African (black)	—	—	—	10.5
Indian	17.0	18.1	14.0	11.8

Courtesy of Library of Congress, U. S. Commissioner-General of Immigration, From data furnished by the Commissioner-general of immigration. Comparison of the fiscal years ending June 30, 1902 and 1903

Description

This source from 1903 highlights the number of immigrants coming to the United States who were illiterate in their native language in reading and writing.

[Transcript of Immigration Figures](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- When considering the data, what can you conclude about illiteracy?
- What does it mean to be literate? How might being literate in your native language influence learning a new language?
- Would this document support or dismiss [Governor William Harding's proclamation](#)? Why or why not?

Citation Information

"Immigration figures for 1903," U. S. Commissioner-General of Immigration, From data furnished by the Commissioner-general of immigration. Comparison of the fiscal years ending June 30, 1902 and 1903. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Immigrants' Landing at Ellis Island, New York, between 1910 and 1920



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Detroit Publishing Co., between 1910 and 1920

Description

More than 12 million immigrants made their first stop in America at the Ellis Island Immigration Station between 1892 and 1954.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is an immigration station?
- Why was this a good location for an immigration station?

Citation Information

"New York, N.Y., immigrants' landing, Ellis Island," Detroit Publishing Company, between 1910 and 1920. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Language Proclamation Concern Letter, June 6, 1918



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 6 June 1918

Description

This is a letter from Pastor Gavert to Governor William Harding pleading for church services to be spoken in their native language, which would go against [Gov. Harding's proclamation](#) that states, "Only English was legal in public or private schools, in public conversations, on trains, over the telephone, at all meetings and in all religious services."

[Transcript of the Language Proclamation Concern Letter](#)

Source-Dependent Question

- Would you agree or disagree with Pastor Gavert's plea to the governor? What evidence would you use to support your answer?

Revocation of Babel Proclamation, 1918



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918

Description

The [Babel Proclamation](#) was issued by Iowa's Governor William L. Harding. He took the anti-German sentiment in the wake of World War I further than any other state, and he proclaimed that "Only English was legal in public or private schools, in public conversations, on trains, over the telephone, at all meetings and in all religious services." This document source is the revocation from Harding that removed executive order from the provisions of the "Babel Proclamation," but upheld the use of English only in classrooms. A revocation is the official cancellation of a decree, decision or promise.

Excerpt from Revocation of Babel Proclamation

"...the English language should be employed as the medium of instruction in all schools, in conversation in public places and over telephones, and in public address, which, as was said, would "result in peace and tranquility at home and greatly strengthen the country..... While we welcome enlightened and thrifty people to our shores and to all the advantages of free institutions under our representative form of government, this is not with the view, and should not be so interpreted, of enabling them to establish themselves in communities by themselves and thereby maintaining the language and customs of their former country. All should understand that they are welcome to come, but for the purpose of becoming a part of our own people, to learn and use our language, adopt our customs, and become citizens of our common country. In Testimony Whereof, I have here unto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Iowa. Done at Des Moines, this fourth day of December, 1918. By the Governor: W. L. Harding W. S. Allen, Secretary of State."

[Transcript of Revocation of Babel Proclamation](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What will Governor William Harding's proclamation mean for immigrants in Iowa?
- Where were immigrants expected to speak English?
- In what ways does requiring immigrants to speak English in school impact an immigrant student's school experience?

“Strong Ties” Article from *The Goldfinch*, April 1991



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Florman, Jean, “Strong Ties,” *The Goldfinch*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 24-25, April 1991

Description

This *Goldfinch* article focuses on the journey of the Tai Dam (pronounced “tie dom”) of Vietnam, who began to arrive in Iowa in 1975. The Tai Dam refugees had been invited to resettle in Iowa by Governor Robert Ray. They originally were from northwestern Vietnam. Between 1954 and 1975, war in Vietnam forced many of them to flee to the nearby countries of Laos and Thailand.

[Transcript of “Strong Ties” Article from *The Goldfinch*](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- When arriving in Iowa, who and how did people help the Tai Dam people?
- Why do older Tai Dam immigrants want their children to learn the Tai Dam language and customs, and to keep alive the stories of their parents’ struggles?

Mario Ruiz Ronquillo Interview about Mexican Immigration and Workplace Culture in the Midwest, December 4, 2015



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "Some Account of the Achievements of the Celebrated Virginian Hero, George Rogers Clark, in the Western Country," *Virginia Argus*, pp. 3, 30 March 1816

Description

This audio interview is of Mario Ruiz Ronquillo, who was born outside of Mexico City, Mexico in 1974. He was one of 10 children who worked to support his parents' subsistence farm. In the late 1980s, his brothers began to leave the farm in search of work in the United States. He followed in 1991, coming first to California, where he worked painting parts for airplanes and began learning English. He later followed his brothers and other family members to Iowa and later Illinois.

He followed his brothers and a cousin into meatpacking work at a former Oscar Mayer plant (then owned by Excel) in Beardstown, Illinois. By the time he started work there in 1999, the plant's workforce was dominated by Mexican immigrants from the region of Michoacán, who, like himself, had come to Beardstown through chain migration. Moreover, like himself, many of these immigrants were "farm kids" who found that meatpacking work, while dangerous and difficult, was familiar to work they had performed in their rural homes. They also developed their own workplace culture, including a practice of banging their knives in unison to celebrate the end of a shift. This common culture supported efforts at collective action (including sabotage) to confront a number of problems, including wage theft and excessive line speeds.

Because of Illinois' closed shop law, rank-and-file employees were members of the union, United Food and Commercial Workers 431, a district local run out of Davenport, Iowa. With superior English skills and a cousin in the union leadership, he began assisting workers in the plant and was soon tapped to become a translator and union steward. He went on to become a member of the local's negotiating committee and, later, an organizer and union representative in charge of locals in both Illinois and Iowa. Beginning in 2006, he was involved in an organizing campaign at Agriprocessors in Postville, Iowa. The plant was the site of a highly publicized and controversial immigration raid in 2008.

[Transcribed Excerpt of Interview from 56:20-1:00:35](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How did Mario Ruiz Ronquillo help workers in the meatpacking industry?
- Why was he chosen to be a union steward and on the negotiating committee?

Citation Information

Ruiz Ronquillo, Mario, Interviewee, John W McKerley, and Sponsor Occupational Folklife Project, "Mario Ruiz Ronquillo interview conducted by John W. McKerley," 4 December 2015. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Immigrant group works to help newcomers integrate in America” Newspaper Article, March 29, 2015



Courtesy of The Cedar Rapids Gazette, Gowans, Alison, “Immigrant group works to help newcomers integrate in America,” *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 29 March 2015

Description

This *Cedar Rapids Gazette* article focuses on the work of the CongoReform Association, a local Iowa group comprised mostly of East African immigrants. The organization’s members work to help new arrivals to the area to find jobs, enroll their children in school and otherwise integrate into Iowa life.

[Transcript of “Immigrant group works to help newcomers integrate in America” Newspaper Article](#)

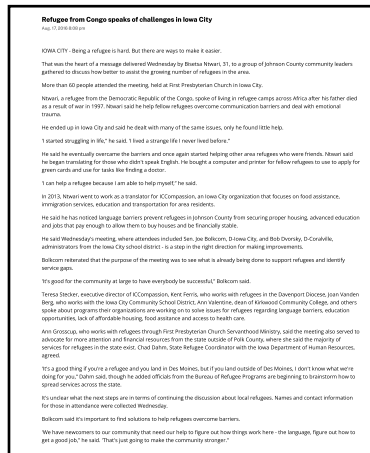
Source-Dependent Questions

- What are some of the reasons that pushed Congolese refugees out of their country and to places like Iowa?
- How does the CongoReform Association help refugees get settled when they come to Iowa?

Citation Information

Gowans, Alison, “Immigrant group works to help newcomers integrate in America,” *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 29 March 2015. [Courtesy of The Cedar Rapids Gazette](#)

“Refugee from Congo speaks of challenges in Iowa City” Newspaper Article, August 17, 2016 (Document)



Courtesy of The Cedar Rapids Gazette, “Refugee from Congo speaks of challenges in Iowa City,” The Cedar Rapids Gazette, 17 August 2016

Description

This article from *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* focuses on an event in Iowa City in 2016 that provided a platform for people who arrived as refugees in Iowa. Community leaders gathered to discuss better ways to assist the growing number of refugees in the area, particularly those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[Transcript of “Refugee from Congo speaks of challenges in Iowa City” Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What are some of the reasons that being a refugee might be hard?
- Why is it important for immigrants and refugees to share their experiences with community members?

Citation Information

“Refugee from Congo speaks of challenges in Iowa City,” *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 17 August 2016. [Courtesy of The Cedar Rapids Gazette](#)

Sokol Festival, July 4-6, 1911



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, July 1911

Description

This image shows a drill team performing during the Sokol festival and tournament at Alamo Park in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Sokols were gymnastics and drilling clubs that originated in the country formerly-known as Czechoslovakia.

Source-Dependent Questions

- How do immigrant groups build community to maintain a connection to their homeland?
- How might native-born Americans feel threatened or uncomfortable by Sokol festivals?

Sauerkraut Day, September 7, 1912



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Shirley, William, 7 September 1912

Description

A large crowd amasses on the town street during Sauerkraut Day in 1912 and are waiting in line for the celebrated food of finely cut cabbage. The town shown actually changed its name from Germania, Iowa, to Lakota, Iowa, in 1917 due to anti-German sentiment created by World War I.

Source-Dependent Questions

- How did immigrants continue cultural traditions when settling in America?
- How do festivals like Sauerkraut Day help immigrants maintain their cultural identity?
- How might native born Americans respond to immigrant festivals?

Bettendorf Foundry Workers, ca. 1920



Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives, "Bettendorf foundry workers," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1920

Description

This photograph shows foundry workers in Bettendorf, Iowa, some of whom migrated from Mexico for work. To document Mexican immigrants in the upper Midwest for the U.S. Department of Labor, George Edson surveyed the Holy City barrio in 1926, located on land owned by the Bettendorf Company in Bettendorf, Iowa, just a few miles upriver from Davenport. His field notes corroborate local accounts of Holy City's first Mexican residents passed down through local families. Edson's records tell us that by 1925, Holy City was a predominantly Mexican community, its residents employed as pieceworkers and day laborers with earnings ranging from as little per year as \$46 to as much as \$1,853. Edson described the racism Mexicans faced in terms of employment, noting their employment opportunities were limited to railroad and foundry work because most Davenport factories had "policies opposed to hiring Mexicans." As a result, many worked in foundries throughout their lives with little opportunity for equal pay or ability to get ahead.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Look closely at the photo. Describe what you see. What job do you think these people had? What makes you say that?
- This photograph shows foundry workers in Bettendorf, Iowa, some of whom migrated from Mexico for work. U.S. Department of Labor employee, George Edson, interviewed the families. His field notes corroborate local accounts of Holy City's first Mexican residents passed down through local families. What does this mean? Why is this important?
- Edson described the racism Mexicans faced in terms of employment, noting their employment opportunities were limited to railroad and foundry work because most Davenport factories had "policies opposed to hiring Mexicans." Compare this photo with *Railroad Workers in Fort Madison, Iowa*. How are the work conditions similar? How are they different? In what ways would racism come into play when immigrants search for work?

Citation Information

"Bettendorf foundry workers," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1920.
[Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives](#)

Wedding of Cruz and Esperanza Martinez in Kansas, 1920



Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives, Martinez, Adella, "Esperanza and Cruz Martinez, 1920," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, 1920

Description

This is a wedding photograph of Cruz and Esperanza Martinez in Kansas in 1920. By the 1920s, over 2,500 Mexican people had settled in Iowa. In the following decades, Iowa's Latinx population continued to grow. Between 2000 and 2010, Iowa's Latinx population doubled to 152,317, five percent of the total population of Iowa (3,046,355). By 2010, West Liberty had become the first majority-minority town in Iowa with Latinx people making up over half of its population. Yet, few people realize that this recent development builds on a long tradition of Latinx migration to Iowa.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What group of people settled in Iowa in the 1920s?
- Why does the description say, there is a "long tradition of Latino migration to Iowa?"
- What impact might a long tradition of migration have on people from Mexico considering coming to Iowa?

Citation Information

Martinez, Adella, "Esperanza and Cruz Martinez, 1920," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, 1920. [Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives](#)

Celebrating Mexican Independence Day in Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1926



Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives, "Celebrating Mexican Independence Day, Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1926," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1926

Description

This photograph shows people celebrating Mexico's Independence Day in Fort Madison, Iowa. The celebrations include fireworks, parties (fiestas), food, dance and music on September 16. Flags, flowers and decorations in the colors of the Mexican flag (red, white and green) are flown in public areas in cities and towns in Mexico, and this tradition was brought to Iowa.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What cultural contribution has this group brought to Iowa?
- How is Mexican Independence Day similar to the Fourth of July or Juneteenth celebrations?
- Why might it be important for immigrants and refugees to carry on traditions from their country of birth?

Citation Information

"Celebrating Mexican Independence Day, Fort Madison, Iowa, ca. 1926," *Migration is Beautiful*, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, ca. 1926. [Courtesy of Iowa Women's Archives](#)

Italian Immigrants in Iowa, April 15, 1942



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 15 April 1942

Description

Carmen Benardino places a service star for her brother, Luis, on a Sons of Aliens Service flag during a ceremony at the Polk County Courthouse in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1942. Some U.S. communities viewed Italian-Americans as “enemy aliens” during the World War II and forced them to relocate from certain areas. Ceremonies like the one shown in the photo were meant to remind the public that Italian-Americans were doing their patriotic duty for their country.

Source-Dependent Question

- What evidence is there of patriotism in the photograph? Are those patriotism symbols important, why or why not?

Sudanese Immigrants in Iowa, late 1990s



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, late 1990s

Description

These Sudanese refugees received acculturation support at Hawthorn Hill Center in Des Moines, Iowa. Refugee assistance programs help refugees find a place to live, basic needs, jobs and lessons to learn the English language.

Source-Dependent Question

- What are the Sudanese refugees seeking help for at the Hawthorn Hill Center?

“Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?” 2003

Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?

Immigrants and refugees live in Iowa for the same reasons other residents live here. Most are drawn by the availability of jobs. Many arrive to take jobs in meatpacking and other agricultural industries. But as time goes by, more newcomers work in other sectors of the economy, including construction, services, retail and hospitality. In many communities their labor is in great demand.

Newcomers also appreciate Iowa's low cost of living, affordable housing and safe communities. Just like established-resident Iowans, immigrants and refugees realize their children receive a fine education in the schools. For refugees and immigrants, living in Iowa provides an opportunity to start a new life for themselves and their children. Iowa provides an opportunity for thousands of newcomers to live their version of the American dream.

Credit:

Adapted from *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans* (2003), provided courtesy of Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa.

<https://www.iowaschs.org/iowaschs/wp-content/uploads/difference-between-immigrants-and-refugees>

Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Some Account of the Achievements of the Celebrated Virginian Hero, George Rogers Clark, in the Western Country,” *Virginia Argus*, pp. 3, 30 March 1816

Description

This adapted document explains some reasons why immigrants and refugees come to Iowa. The document content was adapted from *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans* that was published in 2003.

[Transcript of “Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?”](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How does Iowa provide an opportunity for thousands of newcomers to live their version of the American dream?
- Why do immigrants and refugees come to Iowa?

Citation Information

“Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?” *The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans*, Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa, 2003. [Courtesy of Iowa PBS](#)