Irish Ethnic Group in America

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**Introduction**

America is one of the nations that is comprised of diverse persons emanating from different countries. Immigrants, tourists, and Native Americans make up most of the population within the country. The Irish Ethnic Group is among the tourists who reside within the country. According to Parrillo (2015), about 10.5% of the total American Population, which translates to about 33 Million persons, report to have Irish Ancestry. The Irish community is determined as Americans who have partial or full ancestry from Ireland, especially the ones who identify their cultural characteristics with those practiced in Ireland. It is difficult to promptly distinguish the Irish Americans from the natives in the country, mainly due to their assimilation into the new culture and way of life of the Americans. However, slight cultural practices that showcase the new community is still connected to their ancestry path are evident and are actively practiced within the country. The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed analysis of the Irish Ethnic Group in America, the migration process of these individuals, economic practices, occupation, political involvement, discrimination, religion and other factors associated with people in the said culture.

**Migration of the Irish into America**

The colonial era marked the period when the Irish communities had begun their migration into the United States. Almost half of the Irish immigrants during this period emanated from three provinces in Ireland; Munster, Connacht, and Leinster, while the other half came from Ulster province alone. According to Fredrickson (2015), it is approximated that between 1717 and 1775, a total of about 250,000 Irish persons migrated into the United States. By 1790, an approximate number of 400,000 people with Irish ancestry were living in the United States. Majority of these immigrants settled in the Southern Appalachian backcountry and within Carolina, who became the primary cultural groups in the given region.

By the year 1860, it is reported that the Irish immigrants into the United States had massively increased to about 1.95 Million persons, with 75% of them have moved into the country after the Great Irish Famine occurring between 1845 and 1852. The need for laborers of the Erie Canal Project was one of the factors that caused the growing immigration into the United States. The growing number of Irish Immigrants into the United States was fostered by the lack of land and food in their home country. As a result, the people were forced to seek refuge in many countries, with the United States being one of these nations. The Irish persons were given work in the project, and this result in the growth of the communities in Boston, Providence, Philadelphia and New York, among other nations. Immigration rates were higher among people coming from more impoverished farming communities that had stronger migrant networks. Moreover, sons of farmers and literate men had higher chances of immigrating as compared to their skilled counterparts regardless of the work requirements in the United States.

The immigrants, however, were in favor of large cities within the United States. This was because they would develop their communities in these regions, thus having better protection for their people within a new environment. Moreover, the Irish immigrants would not afford to move inland and were thus forced to settle close to ports within which they had arrived in. As a result, cities such as Los Angeles, St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, Cleveland, San Francisco, and St. Paul, among others, had a high population of these Irish immigrants. However, a large population also settled in the westwards, especially after being enticed by tales of gold and increasing opportunities to get land and work in such regions. In the process of building the Kansas City, strong men were called upon to work in the construction process, and this led to more of the Irish personnel moving to this region as part of their services and as physical laborers.

**Occupations**

Majority of the Irish Protestant Immigrants became farmers as it was one of the primary sources to support them with food. Moreover, the majority of these immigrants headed to the frontier where land was almost free and thus herding, and farming practices were more natural to commence. Since their influx into the country, the majority of the Irish personnel had been working as local laborers and servants in major construction sites. However, as the individual soon became assimilated with the people, they learned of new ways of life and would that develop an interest in other fields. This was primarily because most of the Catholic Immigrants, especially after 1840, had gone directly to cities, railroad, canals and mill town’s constructions within the East Coast. However, the individuals who remained unemployed after their immigration lived in squalid conditions within the new city and some of them had to live in tenements and new city slums at that period. The others who had assumed jobs were given low pay. The Irish women, however, preferred domestic work within the American Households, which were offered primarily by the middle and upper class of the households. The working conditions in these homes was much better compared to working in mills and factories. However, the women had to work round the clock to meet the demands of their homestead employers.

**Local Government**

Due to the massive influx of the Irish community within the United States, they were able to secure jobs within the local government by the 19th Century. According to Healey, Stepnick, & O'Brien, (2018), politicians in the United States would offer jobs in local government to their supporters. The Irish people had an active community around the City Hall, which resulted in having many of their candidates selected to fill many departments inclusive of the fire department, public schools, and other services offered in the major cities. The consolidation of the five boroughs in 1897 developed more than 20,000 new patronage jobs that relied heavily on large scale public work. As a result, jobs demanding for both skilled and unskilled personnel were developed, inclusive the construction of waterworks, subways, street railways, and ports, among others. More than half of the Irish men who had migrated into the country by this time, therefore, were employed by the municipal government.

**Police**

In the year 1840, Irish Immigration had been on the rise, and this was mainly due to their need to have a better settlement. The New York Police Commissioner, in 1855, George Mastell, claimed that about 17% of the police department’s officers in the nation had an Irish ancestry (Mitchell, 2017). This means that about in all the departments, there were at least ten men who were Irish. As the years continued to grow, the Irish representation in the police departments also continued, with about 42% of the NYPD by 1960 being Irish Americans. The Emerald Society was formed in 1953 by the NYPD as an Irish American Fraternal Organization, and a Boston Chapter of the same Society was later formed in 1973, after which half of the police in the city were associated with the club. This shows that the Irish Community had been assimilated with the United States such that they gained police roles to offer community services as part of their occupation. To the current date, the Irish Americans still offer their services to the community as Police Officers, and others have been given other roles within the many departments in the Police sector.

**Teachers**

Initially, the females, after immigration, focused more on sourcing work as house helps in the American Homesteads. However, on the onset of the 20th Century, school teaching was considered a desirable occupation for these females. The Irish immigrants saw teaching being a similar task to domestic work that the first generation immigrant women had undertaken in that it was not only fashionable but also an approach that would support their need for independence rather than relying on marriage. According to Smyth, Feeney, Eidson, & Coley, (2017), the Irish National School system was as a result of the disproportionate number of Irish American Catholic Women who had entered the job market as teachers. This was primarily in the late 19th Century and Early 20th Century, with most of these females emanating from San Francisco to Boston. The importance of education, college training, and professionalism was instilled by the Irish schools which purposed to prepare single women for the future. The females were taught on practices to remain relevant in the society while becoming independent. By the year 1890, two-thirds of the Sixth Ward Schools were female teachers, and they had attained excellent reputations in their field of practice. The Irish Female Immigrants, therefore, had a higher chance of having higher stature occupations in the field of teaching.

**Nuns**

Upon the arrival of the Irish community in the United States, it was temporal for them to sustain their culture of having fewer marriages. This resulted in Irish women choosing to become Catholic nuns and continually participating in American Sisterhoods. Catholics such as St. Paul in Minnesota, St. Louis in Missouri and Troy in New York were the most filled with the Irish women. According to Mitchell (2017), the women who settled in these communities were often sent back to Ireland to recruit other females and thus help to grow their culture even more. As a result, the females outnumbered the male counterparts in America, thus tending to abide with the Irish culture of having postponed marriages and gender separation to aid in having single ladies. The clergy, Catholic Church women who appeared to be very religious, were highly respected in Ireland, thus making sisterhood to be an attractive venture to the Irish immigrants. The nuns were renowned for providing extensive support to the immigrants and would offer them training on fields such as nursing, teaching, and domestic work. Irish schools built within the country, therefore, were majorly controlled by the nuns, but most of the Irish parents decided to have their children attend other schools based on their liking.

**Religion**

Religion plays a vital role in the community. The Irish Americans have for long been known to align their lifestyles based on community practices. To the current date, the Irish subscribe majorly to Catholic and Protestant churches within the United States. The trend has continued since the community’s immigration into the United States. However, there are other minor religions with which the people align with, but Christianity is their central focus.

**Catholics**

By the 1790s, Irish priests had arrived in the large cities within the United States, and especially the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and the Capuchins. The year 1808 led to the First Bishop of New York emanating from the Irish communities. By 1845, the Catholic population in Boston had increased to about 30,000 as a result of the Irish immigrants into the United States. The Irish later become prominent in leading Catholic Churches, with 7.4 Million Catholics being in the United States by the 20th Century.

**Protestants**

Most of the Irish immigrants who settled in the backcountry in Colonial America were in remote regions, thus attending Presbyterian Church. This was also done as a way of meeting the demand for qualified clergy educated persons. However, the Methodists and Baptist religious groups did not require the high level of education, and this meant that their ministries could easily be catered for by many personnel especially after the growing Irish settlements within the area. As a result, by 1810, Baptist and Methodist churches had vastly grown, and their descendants continue to remain among the predominant churches within the United States. The Irish settlements had a positive impact on the American Revolution, which was essential in formulating the American Culture and hence taking pride in the Irish heritage.

**Sense of Heritage**

Majority of the Irish descendants retain their sense of heritage by having historical artifacts to remind them of their culture. Ireland itself recognizes people with the Irish ancestry living abroad and who share the cultural heritage of the people. The descendants who live in America share a connection and identify with Ireland based on their ethnicity, rather than their nationality (Barton, 2019). Persons born in the United States and who are separated from their Irish-ancestors by many generations but who still consider themselves to be Irish are referred to as the Plastic Paddy. Currently, Massachusetts hampers majority of the Iris communities, with New Hampshire and Rhoe Island following in second and third places respectively.

The extensive assimilation into the American Culture, the Irish community has been slowly deteriorating in appreciating the domestic cultural heritage. However, aspects such as Music and songs have had their role in developing America’s country music that is based on traditional Irish ballads. Their dances are also integral and have been practiced in many occasions, especially the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. The Irish Americans generally eat the American genetic food as well as the cuisine of other ethnic groups within the country. The unique Irish cuisine, however, is taken in much less frequent occasions but can be found in Irish restaurants and pubs throughout the United States.

The Irish marriages have various controversies but appeal to the community and are thus considered a good practice. The Irish age of marriage was older compared to the other numerous groups with the primary reason being that the individuals had to gain financial stability. However, in the older generation, the majority did not marry and had decided to remain celibate due to religious reasons, embarrassment about sex, and other factors. As the community was absorbed into the American culture, delayed marriages became less frequent, primarily due to less sexual dysfunction. Divorce and has become a key concept in Irish Americans, with more of these persons having a negative attitude towards the Catholic Church and abiding with civil divorce and annulment of marriages in church. Intermarriages have also occurred in the later generations, and this has had a significant impact on blurring the lines of ethics. Assimilation into the United States has further been facilitated by the interaction of people with other communities, attending school, interaction in the Church, and other practices.

The female dominance of domestic life characterized Women's role in the Irish American community, and it was common for the mother to play the role of raising the children. However, not all the women were tied to the house chores as the majority had community-oriented projects and employment, especially after they arrived in the United States. The modern Irish Women follow a similar trend to their older generation and devote their time towards meeting the housework while working in part-time and full-time employment to support the family financially. In the professional sphere, great women have developed in academia, politics, law, business, and other competitive occupations.

The size of the family remains large, mainly due to the continued teaching in the Catholic Church on contraceptives. The socio-economic lifestyle of the family determines how these children are reared, schools they attend, and other attributes. However, kindness, politeness, obedience, and avoiding conflict are among the significant teachings offered to these children as they grow. The father has the role of the disciplinarian, and it is expected that the father will assure ethical conduct of the children as they grow while the mother trains them on other necessities of life.

The modern Irish Americans rarely wear traditional costumes within the nation. These traditional attires were mainly considered essential in ensuring that the community uphold their culture and were a representation of consistency and growth. Assimilation into the American culture has fostered the integration of new costumes and clotheslines for the Irish Americans, especially with recent changes in fashion. It becomes challenging to differentiate the communities based on their ethnicity, and this is fostered by the changes in fashion that are rapid and occur at all times.

**Conclusion**

This paper was developed to provide an outline of the relevant aspects related to the Irish Ethnic group in America, their immigration, culture, economic life, family setup, and other factors. It is clear from the study that the Irish Americans have been in the United States for an extended period, with their decedents taking up more than 33 million of the current United States Population. Their culture, however, has been blurred with the assimilation of the people into the United States, intermarriages, and interactions within schools and other facilities. Despite these associations, it is common to find Irish cuisines in Irish restaurants as most of the people do not prepare such meals in their homes more commonly.

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