

Whipple
Apush-Period 8
17 February 2017

Appel, John J. "From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in *Puck*, 1876–1910."

Comparative Studies in Society and History 13.04 (1971): 365. Web. 10 Feb. 2017.


<<http://www.museum.msu.edu/appelcollection/pdf/From%20Shanties%20to%20Lace%20Curtains.pdf>>.

In the article, "From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in *Puck*, 1876-1910", John J. Appel, a professor of American Thought and Language at Michigan State University and one of the preeminent collectors of immigrant and ethnic images in popular graphics, analyzes the accuracy and relevancy of different stereotypes contained in *Puck Magazine* during the late 1800s. Appel explores how the stereotypes portrayed in these magazines were prevalent in the era, and continue to be found in contemporary society. In the beginning of the article, Appel provides a brief history of the magazine, summarizing how it gained popularity, detailing the number of copies it sold, and how it became significant during the late 1870's and early 1900's (Appel 365-369). The writer/cartoon artist that Appel focuses on is Joseph Keppler, who also published the magazine. The article goes into detailed analysis of how immigrant groups, like the Irish, and minorities, such as African-Americans, have been stereotyped, looking into the origins of these stereotypes (Appel 371-374). While the article clarifies that *Puck* was created to make fun of these groups with the use of satire and humor, the author argues that the intent was more brutal than the magazine had claimed and posits that these groups were stereotyped because they are (unfairly) disliked by the majority population. For example, while Irish immigrants and African Americans group are vastly different, with differing ethnicities and cultural

backgrounds, the majority of American people (whites) lumped them together as a group of people they considered “inferior” (Appel 371-374). This broadscale discrimination had a long-lasting negative impact on these groups.

The thesis of Appel’s article is that, through the portrayal in the media, especially in *Puck Magazine*, stereotypes of immigrants and minorities were created and maintained; however, he also suggests that these same stereotypes provide an important view into and an understanding of the historical context of the time period. While his thesis is unique, in that it explores the reasons behind these stereotypes, and their logic, Appel does not do a proficient job in refuting these stereotypes, and explaining how they are wrong. Appel’s argument is backed by the evidence of historical events showing Nativist sentiment in the U.S., in current history textbooks, such as *Fraser: By the People*.


Appel critically analyzes the political cartoons and articles by writers of *Puck* to support his assertions. He cites four political cartoons, each with its own description, to show how the embellishments led to negative public perceptions of the targeted groups. For example, the second political cartoon, titled ‘The Bugaboo of Congress’ portrays an ape-like creature, with a belt saying “Irish Vote” (Quoted from Appel Plate 2). This is an image suggesting inferiority, because the cartoon portrays a savage creature with less than human intelligence, contributing to the stereotype of Irish people as uncivilized and uneducated. Later on in the article, Appel, while not completely agreeing with the message of the stereotype, mentions that the Irish loved to drink, that alcoholism is more common among Irish than any other European immigrant groups, and that they were often the most violent, poorest, etc., again supporting the Irish stereotype of being animalistic and uncivilized (Appel 373). While some factual phenomena underlie the



origination/formation of stereotypes, Appel argues that the embellishment, overgeneralization, and superiority bias of both political cartoons and other negative portrayals of immigrant groups, helped the majority public stereotype these groups, and continue to influence our thinking of these people in today's society. His suggestion these stereotypes still exist today is mostly presented at the end of the article, but represents a culmination of his findings.

In the textbook, a number of facts, statistics, and events are presented that are consistent with Appel's assertions regarding the factual underpinnings of stereotypes. The small section provided in the textbook, explains the reasons for Irish immigration, the growing nativism within the United States, the reasons behind this feeling of nativism, and finally the groups/organizations that were founded on the common stance of anti-immigration.


The textbook explains that the Irish potato famine combined with the opportunity for a better life, stimulated the wave of Irish immigration to the United States in the late 1800s. While wages for Irish immigrants were low, when compared to native U.S. workers, jobs were plentiful, and there was an opportunity to acquire a steady income (Fraser 360–362). The textbook describes the growing nativism that occurred during this period rooted in both religious differences (Irish were predominantly Catholic, while U.S. was predominantly Protestant) and a perception that immigrants were “stealing” factory jobs from Americans because they were willing to work for lower wages (Fraser 360–362). Additionally, the textbook explains how many Irish moved to the Eastern cities, causing an influx in population that was unwanted in these already very crowded cities. Some groups mentioned in the textbook included the Know-Nothing Party, and the American Protective Association, both nativist/anti-immigration groups (Fraser 360–362).



In comparing Appel's article with the textbook, there were some similarities in that both provided historical facts about immigration and its impact on the American population. However, the textbook contained less opinion and perspective in its writing, focusing rather on the origins of Irish immigration, and how the nativism movement became prominent in American society. In his article, Appel explores the relation between nativism and the use of stereotypes in the United States, rather than just providing information about nativism. In addition, Appel explores more diverse sources, rather than just using firsthand accounts/documents, like the textbook. Instead, he chose to explore where stereotypes originated, analyzing magazine articles and political cartoons in a satirical magazine, *Puck*. This allowed him to form a thesis that stereotypes, although biased and invalid, do have some validity and an origin that somewhat justifies them.

In conclusion, the text provides some support to Appel's argument that stereotypes in part, originate from historical facts/events, such as the higher rates of alcoholism, violence, and poverty within the Irish immigrant population of the time. However, this does not justify that the position that Irish are inferior to others and that they are any less intelligent than the general population simply for being Irish. Appel does provide meaningful research on stereotypes, and has a unique perspective on the subject matter. However, he should be focusing on how these stereotypes, while being somewhat understandable, are disparaging and unfair to innocent ethnic groups, who are forced to escape/live with wrongful stereotypes that they have been branded with.

A college history student should find this article useful, because while the argument presented does not address well enough the dark side of stereotyping, it does provide a valid



understanding for how stereotypes develop, and it utilizes multiple sources to explain its reasoning. The exploration of unusual sources, such as political cartoons, newspaper articles, provides a college student with material that they might not otherwise have exposure to. At the same time, these sources allow Appel to present an unusual, but comprehensible argument: stereotypes are wrong, but the formation and origins of them are reasonable.



Works Cited

Appel, John J. "From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in Puck, 1876–1910."

Comparative Studies in Society and History 13.04 (1971): 365. Web. 10 Feb. 2017.

<<http://www.museum.msu.edu/appelcollection/pdf/From%20Shanties%20to%20Lace%20Curtains.pdf>>.

Fraser, James W. "Chapter 12: Living in a Nation of Changing Lands, Changing Faces, Changing

Expectations, 1831–1854 ." *By the People: a History of the United States*, Pearson, Boston, 2016, pp. 360–362, Accessed 12 Feb. 2017.