



REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

“The Geography of the Melting Pot” by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.

The United States is often referred to as a “melting pot” or a great stew of ethnic immigrants. Our schools generally focus on the immigrant experience by discussing the hardships immigrants experienced while journeying to North America.

But once a migrant arrived in the “New World” they had to settle somewhere. This is an aspect of immigration history that often gets overlooked. Namely, did certain ethnic groups settle in particular areas?

Well, the answer is yes. Where groups settled has a lot to do with where and when they arrived in the United States. For example, early English immigrants had little choice but to stay close to the East Coast. The west of North America was largely off-limits to them be-

cause of physical and human barriers.

Later immigrants, for example those who came at the end of the 19th century, had a larger area of the country to settle because the United States and Canada had both expanded westward. Many Scandinavians, for example, settled in the upper Midwest because it was an open area when they arrived at the end of the 19th century. Link 1 shows this pattern for Americans of Norwegian ancestry.

Cultural barriers also directed immigrant groups to certain areas. Early German immigrants, largely Lutheran in religious affiliation, were not welcomed in the Puritan dominated New England or Southern states. Thus, many chose to settle in Pennsylvania because of Quaker tolerance of religious diversity. From there, they moved westward and spilled into the Midwest as the country’s boundaries migrated westward. See Link 2 below for a map of Americans with German ancestry and note that few Germans are found in New England or the Southeast.



Pella, Iowa 2003

Port of entry is obviously vital. Although Asian-Americans can be found everywhere in the country, they are more concentrated in the Western states because many Asian immi-

grants arrive in the West, have family in the West, and are closer to their homelands by staying in the West. Link 3 shows a map of the Japanese American population in 1990.

Further Research

1. What are the most common ethnic or ancestry groups in your community and why did they settle there?
2. Are there traditions in your area that are related to a particular ethnic group, such as an Oktoberfest? If there are, do they go back to time of settlement or have they been created to create an ethnic identity or attract tourists?

Links:

- 1) Norwegian Ancestry 1990
- 2) German Ancestry 1990
- 3) Japanese Americans

<http://130.166.124.2/atlas.us1/US118.GIF>

<http://130.166.124.2/atlas.us1/US111B.GIF>

<http://130.166.124.2/atlas.us1/US0054.GIF>