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Lesson Plan: Comparisons and Connections: Irish and Jews in the American South

Introduction

This two-part lesson plan is for “Irish Identities in the American South,” a special topics Irish Studies course at Georgia Southern University I am teaching for the Spring 2020 semester. This plan is part of a larger unit intended to examine points of comparison and contrast between the experiences of Irish Americans in the South with that of other ethnic, racial, and religious groups, including Jewish and African Americans. Students will also examine cultural, economic, and religious interactions among these groups in both urban and rural areas of the South. I also hope to utilize this lesson plan in a future, more broadly based course entitled, “Immigrants and Ethnic Identity in the American South.”

Day 1: Overview: Comparisons & Connections of Irish and Jews in the South

Topics: Students will examine Jewish migration patterns to Southern ports, the establishment of synagogues, economic, political, and social roles, and processes of acculturation. Specific attention will be paid to points of intersection and community-building, such as peddlers interacting with Scots Irish farmers in rural areas and friendships among Catholic and Jewish clergy, businessmen, and politicians in such cities as Charleston and Savannah. Attention will also be paid to issues of regional, ethno-religious, and racial identity, particularly during moments of conflict, such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Jim Crow period.

Readings:

- Jonathan D. Sarna, “Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts^[1]”

- Suzanne J. Ural, “Introduction,” *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity*
- Diane C. Vecchio, “Making Their Way in the New South: Jewish Peddlers and Merchants in the South Carolina Up Country”

Day 2: Ethno-Religious Identity & the Importance of Place: Irish and Jewish Savannahians

Meeting: Class will meet at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and Congregation Mickve Israel

Topic: Inhabitants of individual Irish and Jewish communities in America developed history, culture, memories, and identity that had much in common with their compatriots nationwide, but that were nonetheless shaped by regional and local circumstances. In this class session, students will tour two Savannah institutions located just seven minutes away from each other: the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, the oldest Catholic church in Georgia, and Congregation Mickve Israel, the third oldest Jewish congregation in America. These historic structures reflect the long history of the Irish Catholic and Jewish communities in Savannah and their continued determination to grow and prosper.

Readings:

- Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1870”
- Sarah A. Ryniker, “Savannah’s Ethnic Irish Neighborhoods in the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Multimethod Examination”

Activity: Students will tour each location and conduct artifact analysis

Artifact Analysis Worksheet
(adapted from Dale Rosengarten and Shari Rabin, College of Charleston)

Instructions: Pay attention to specific details located on the exterior, in the sanctuary/church, and in the museum/shop while touring each location. Consider one feature or object from each structure that intrigued you. Using your skills of observation, critical thinking, and inquiry, please answer the questions below. Be prepared to share your observations with the group.

Describe the appearance of the feature/object.

Cathedral:

Mickve Israel:

What can you tell (or guess) about how this artifact was/is used?

Cathedral:

Mickve Israel:

What might the feature tell us about the community and/or time in which it was/is used?

Cathedral:

Mickve Israel:

What intrigued you about this object? Does it remind you of anything you're familiar with from a different context? Do you have any questions about it?

Cathedral:

Mickve Israel:

Compare and contrast your object/features from both locales. What do they tell you about the similarities/differences between Catholic and Jewish practice and the specific communities in Savannah?

Cathedral:

Mickve Israel: