

BLACK, WHITE & BEYOND

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HISTORY

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IMMIGRATION & MIGRATION IN THE INDUSTRIAL AGE 1870-1930

A second wave of immigration to the United States occurred from 1870 to WWI. After the war, immigration continued until seriously diminished by legal restrictions in the United States and the Great Depression. In this period, the dominant sources were Southern and Eastern Europe, although there was a sizable wave of Chinese immigration into mainly the West coast. Immigrants during this period were motivated to immigrate due to shortages of land, cheaper transportation, and the hope of making money to send home. Between 1870 and 1920 some 11 million immigrants came to the United States.

In Akron, the new ethnic groups began to make their presence known. They became part of the rising population of the city, which increased from 27,601 in 1890 to 42,728 in 1900 and reached 69,000 by 1910. A comparison of the 1920 and 1930 Census of Akron reveals the nationalities of immigrants to the city.

Immigrant Groups	1920 Ranking	1930 Ranking
German	1	1
Hungarian	2	3
Austrian	3	10
Russian	4	9
Italian	5	2
English	6	4
Irish	7	8
Greek	8	-
Canadian	9	-
Scottish	10	-
Yugoslavia	-	5
Polish	-	6
Czech	-	7

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In 1920 the top immigrant groups in Akron were Germans, Hungarians, Austrians, and Russians. However, by 1930 the influx on immigration changed the ranking. Germans retained the largest immigrant group in Akron, but Italians, who had been fifth in 1920, were the second largest immigrant group by 1930. Hungarians slipped to third, and English immigrants were fourth. Yugoslavians, Polish, and Czechs, who were not even ranked in 1920, were fifth, sixth, and seventh by 1930, and Greeks, Canadians and Scottish fell out of the top ten.

The immigrants during this period, as with the Germans and Irish in the past, formed social organizations, clubs, and churches. They settled in ethnic neighborhoods, often near the booming rubber factories that were giving Akron its claim to fame as the "Rubber Capital of the World." There was a Polish-American club on Glenwood Avenue, and Hungarian and German Clubs on Grant Street. Many of these clubs and organizations still exist. The immigrants also held picnics, parades and other cultural affairs to celebrate their cultural heritages. Most of the immigrants of the period eventually moved out of these ethnic areas by the second generation. Akron's growth also came from the migration of white Appalachians to the city in search of work in the booming rubber industry. Their migration made Akron the fastest growing city in the United States during the 1910s, going from a population of 69,000 to 208,435 by 1920. Although more spread out than some ethnic groups, Appalachians settled in distinct places such as Ellet, Lakemore and Rittman. The annual picnic sponsored by the West Virginia Society in Akron became one of the largest cultural events in the city.

African Americans also continued to grow in numbers and influence during this period. The black population of Akron remained relatively small through 1900, rising from 278 in 1880 to 525 by 1900. It began to rise more dramatically after 1900, as migration increased with the rubber boom in Akron, reaching 5,580 in 1920. Blacks settled in the area of North Broadway, Furnace and Cuyahoga Streets and established themselves in a variety of occupations. Black churches and social clubs formed the early foundations of black cultural life. And while Akron may have been free of the Southern variety of Jim Crow, discrimination and racial animosity persisted. In August 1900 a race riot occurred when a white crowd demanded the release of a black male prisoner, Louis Peck, being held in jail at the City Building on charges of raping a white girl. The Sheriff sent Peck to Cleveland but the crowd attacked the City Building and Courthouse, burning both to the ground. As the black population increased, so too did discrimination, with blacks unable to obtain service at various public facilities in the Akron area and housing restrictions having greater effect.

Despite the discrimination, blacks continued to make contributions and become a presence in the city. The number of churches increased, Akron saw its first set of black newspapers, and the Akron branch of the NAACP formed in 1917. African American men and women also established themselves in various businesses, with blacks entering the city police force for the first time in the 1920s. In athletics, Fritz Pollard, now in the Pro Football Hall of Fame became the first African American coach in National Football League history when he took charge of the Akron Pros in 1921.

The outbreak of WWI curtailed much of this immigration to the United States and in the 1920s, a revival of nativism led the United States to restrict immigration. Two laws passed by Congress in the 1920s set quotas that restricted the numbers of Southern and Eastern Europeans that could enter the country. The 1924 law also barred the entry of all Asians except for residents of the Philippines. There were no limits set on immigration from the Western Hemisphere.

Akron saw its own version of the nativism that characterized the nation in the 1920s. The rubber companies pushed for the Americanization of their employees, but they also took pride in employing immigrants. By the 1920s the B.F. Goodrich Company proclaimed to have immigrants employees from



twenty four different companies.

But there were uglier signs. In Akron, the Ku Klux Klan formed in 1921. By the mid 1920s the Klan's membership had grown to 52,000 members and was the largest Klan chapter in the United States. The Klan also controlled the Mayor's office, the Superintendent of Schools, the County Sheriff, the County Prosecutor, the Clerk of Courts, 2 of the 3 County Commissioners, and 4 out of 7 of the seats of the Akron Board of Education. Influence also extended to the Akron Police Department and the local National Guard.

In the early 1920s, the Klan in Akron controlled much of the power structure in Summit County, but not without protest. During the peak of Klan activities, the NAACP, the Akron Jewish Community, and the Young Men's Progressive Club led protests against Klan meetings, parades and public activities. By 1925 active membership in the Klan began to decline, caused by internal disputes, lack of leadership and increased amounts of outside opposition. By 1928 the Klan was no longer an important or large factor in Akron politics or the lives of its citizens.

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