

IV. Where would you live? Waterbury in 1920

Subject(s):

Time Needed: 50 minute session

Objectives:

- ✓ reflect on historical conditions in Waterbury
- ✓ use analytical and organizational skills to develop a comprehensive understanding of another historical period
- ✓ decipher the layout and uses of the “Brass City Life” website
- ✓ enhance community dialogue within the classroom over shared space and traditions within a neighborhood setting

Areas/Disciplines Covered:

American Studies (community formation, international communities)
Ethnic Studies (ethnicity, immigration)
Geography (maps, physical neighborhoods)
History (U.S., local)
Urban Studies (neighborhood development, demographic and census information)

Materials:

- map of Waterbury neighborhoods
- internet access to website, “Brass City Life” (www.brasscitylife.org)
- a printout of the census breakdown by race/ethnicity in 1920
- paper and writing utensil for the students

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4-5. Each group should have access to at least one computer for their research.
2. Hand-out one of the identities to each group. They will recognize their ethnicity by having it highlighted on the census printout. For example, if a group received a census and the category “Polish” was highlighted, they should understand that this is now the shared identity of their entire group. (A possible list of races/ethnicities would include: African/Black American, English, French Canadian, German, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian.) [To find the information on these groups, see **Related Resources** at the end of the lesson.]
3. Announce to the students that it is no longer 2005 (or whichever year it actually is)--it is now 1920. They are living in Waterbury as a family and it is now their job, as a unit, to navigate the city. Their task is to find the answers to the questions before them:

Based on your race or ethnicity, what Waterbury neighborhood does your family most likely live in? What factors may have contributed to why you live there?

What country did your family (ancestors) most likely come from? Why might your family have left that country? Why might they come to Waterbury?

Who else may live in your neighborhood? Are there other races and/or ethnicities that live there as well?

What are some of the cultural activities that your family might participate in? Are they done individually, as a family or as a larger group/neighborhood?

Do you attend church? If so, which church might you attend and why? Do other people from your neighborhood go there?

How might the people in your home make a living? What might their jobs be? Is anyone in school? If so, what school might they attend?

Write all of these questions on the board for the students or provide a handout. Allow the students 15-20 minutes to investigate and find the answers to the questions. They should begin to find the answers they need by looking within specific neighborhoods and browsing each to see whether or not their ethnicity is represented there. **Keep in mind that there may be multiple correct answers to the questions above.** (For example, Italians may be found in Brooklyn as well as South End). They will be graded on making a cogent and persuasive argument based in the facts they find on the website. Make sure that they are using the map reading and photography analysis skills that they learned earlier in the unit.

5. Reconvene the large class and ask each group to briefly present on their family, using one or two spokespeople. They can answer the questions one by one or give highlights, depending on time. Allow the students to be even more creative by asking impromptu questions such as, “So you’re an Italian family; what are your names?”.

6. After large group presentations, switch the timeframe and ask in large group, “It’s now 2005. Where might your family live?” Take a few answers but end by telling the students that not only would they probably live somewhere else but, if they were immigrants to Waterbury today, that they may be a different race and/or ethnicity. Use this statement to highlight the changing nature of Waterbury’s population. That discussion may be carried over into the following sessions.

Related Resources:

Census (broken down by ethnicity, age, race) with state mappings of the data:

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/census/index.html>

To get to the New Haven County information, take the following steps from the website above:

1. Under Historical Data, click on “United States historical census browser (1790-1960)”
2. Under census year, click on “1920”
3. Under variables, click on “Ethnicity/Race/Place of Birth”
4. Select all of the categories under “Ethnicity/Race/Place of Birth” by holding down on the ‘Shift’ key while dragging the mouse to the bottom of the list.
5. Click on “submit query”

6. Find Connecticut on the list of states and check the box to the left.
7. Click “Retrieve County Level Data” at the bottom of the chart
8. Use the information for New Haven County and map each ethnic identity represented by your student groups.

Vocabulary List

culture: the traditions and customary values, foods, ideas, and practices that in part define a religious, ethnic, racial or geographic group.

ethnicity: the categorical affiliation between people sharing a racial, linguistic, cultural or tribal ancestry.

immigrant: someone who goes to a country from another country with the intent of permanent residence.