

TEACHER GUIDE

Future City Lab: Immigration

1.) Talking Points for Historic Context

Taken from the Port City: 1609-1898 gallery within the Museum's flagship exhibition, New York At Its Core.

Immigrants from Europe transformed New York City in the 1840s and '50s. A deadly famine in Ireland and economic and political unrest in Germany joined urbanization, improved transportation, and an exploding population to drive millions of people across the Atlantic, two-thirds of them through New York Harbor. By 1855 over half of New York City's 630,000 people were immigrants, the highest percentage in the city's history. More than one in every four New Yorkers was Irish-born, and Catholics, who had earlier been banned, were now one-third of the population. German Jewish arrivals made New York's Jewish community – numbering 30,000 by 1856 – the nation's largest.

Despite the obstacles they faced, including lack of housing, poor sanitation, and subsistence living, the newcomers often made their way up in the world. In the process, they reshaped New York. Immigrants provided muscle to unload ships, build streets, and produce vast quantities of goods. Collaborating with white and black native-born New Yorkers – even as they competed with them for jobs and housing – the new arrivals also created a new, ethnically inflected urban culture, expressed in music hall songs, street slang, and mass politics with a distinctive New York flavor.

During the Irish potato famine (1845-52), New York-based shippers saw an opportunity to fill the holds of packet ships on their return trips across the Atlantic with famine refugees crowded into airless, disease-filled quarters below decks. By 1855, 176,000 Irish-born men, women, and children had become New Yorkers.

Irish and Germans sailed into a harbor that was already changing, as the port city became an industrial one. New Yorkers were discarding old regulations governing prices, employment, and markets, and the new, freer economy was opening possibilities for enterprise and exploitation alike.

Many poor New Yorkers – white and black – settled in the crowded tenements of lower Manhattan's Five Points slum. Middle-class Protestants denounced the neighborhood as the epicenter of urban chaos: a place of alcoholism, brothels, crime, Catholic foreigners, and racial mixing. By the 1850s, visitors warned that the district rivaled London's slums as the most densely populated place on Earth.

Seeking a better life, the new arrivals created a system of institutions rooted in their own parish churches, schools, hospitals, and asylums. In the Five Points and other

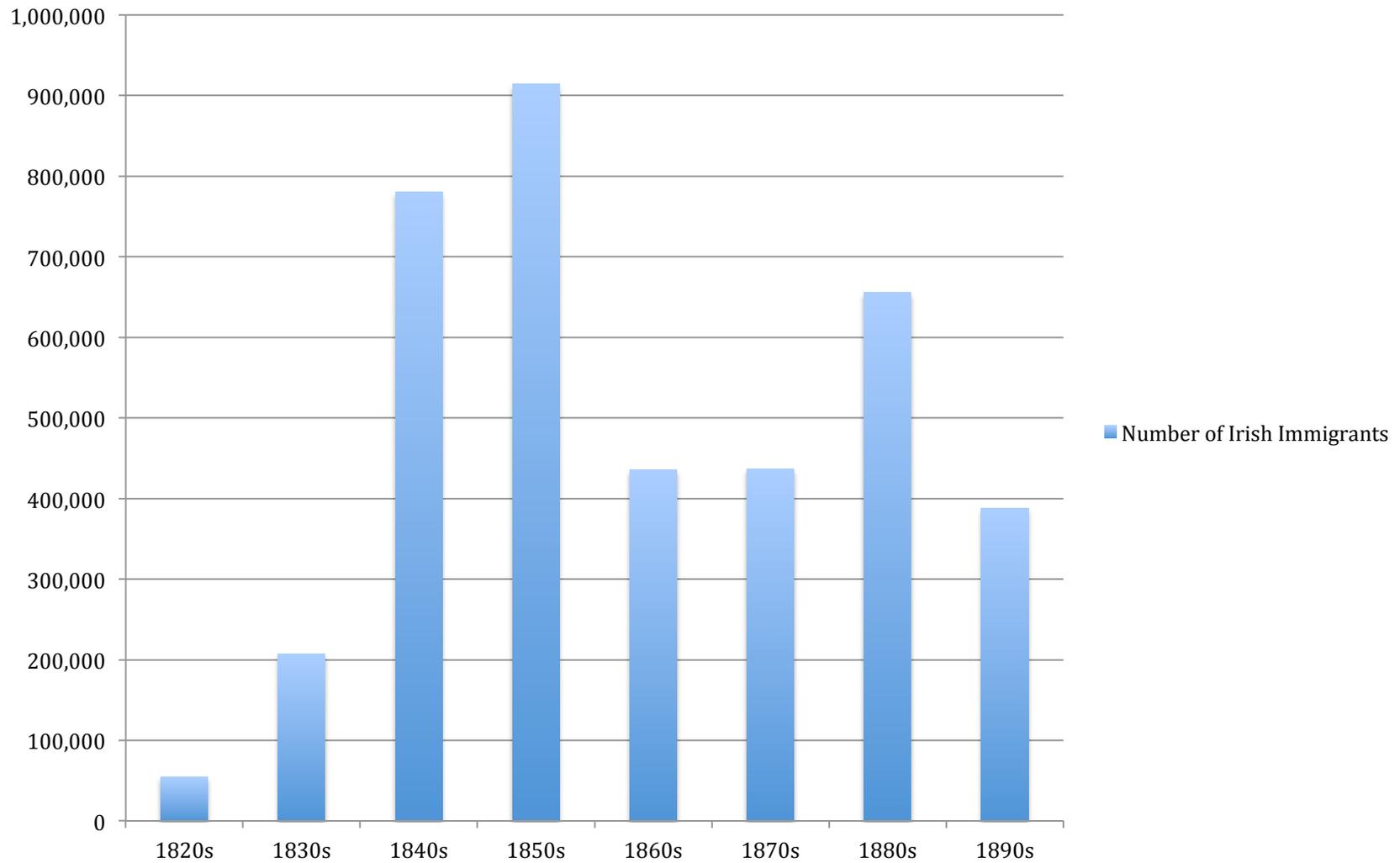
neighborhoods, immigrants turned saloons and firehouses into informal community centers and political clubhouses, sources of jobs in the expanding city, and headquarters for local street gangs.

The frustrations of poor workers exploded in 1863 in the Draft Riots, the worst civil unrest in American history. Enraged by a Civil War draft lottery that allowed rich men to pay for a substitute to serve in their place, immigrants rioted for four days, attacking African Americans and wealthy Republicans, both of whom they blamed for the war. One hundred buildings were burned, including the Colored Orphan Asylum. Over 100 New Yorkers died, and hundreds more were injured. Sensing political opportunity, Tammany Hall, the city's Democratic Party organization, backed a plan to pay for draft substitutes for poor men. Even before the war, Tammany welcomed Irishmen, rewarding their votes with jobs and favors. Under "Boss" William M. Tweed, Tammany now became a base for Irish-American political power. The Boss was toppled from power in 1871, but Tammany remained a stronghold for the city's voting immigrants.

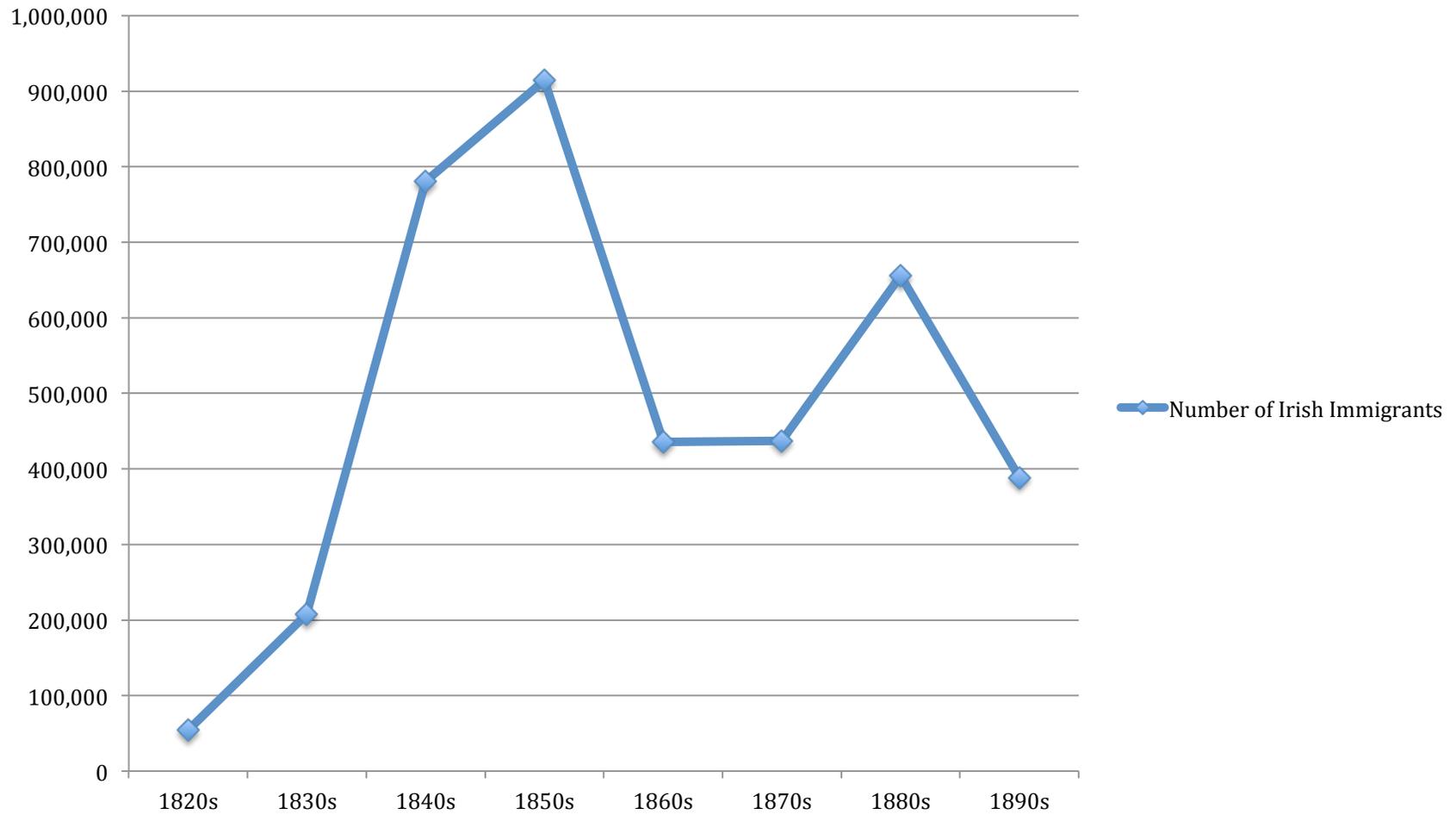
2.) Visuals for Class Discussion: Below find a series of three graphs: the first a basic bar graph of the total number of Irish immigrants, then a line graph for comparison (and to make trends clearer), and finally a line graph that indicates what percentage (or *proportion*) the Irish were within total immigration over time.

You'll also see an infographic on New York City's average annual population turnover. Ask students to analyze the information. What is driving New York's population growth? Why is a growing population important to a city?

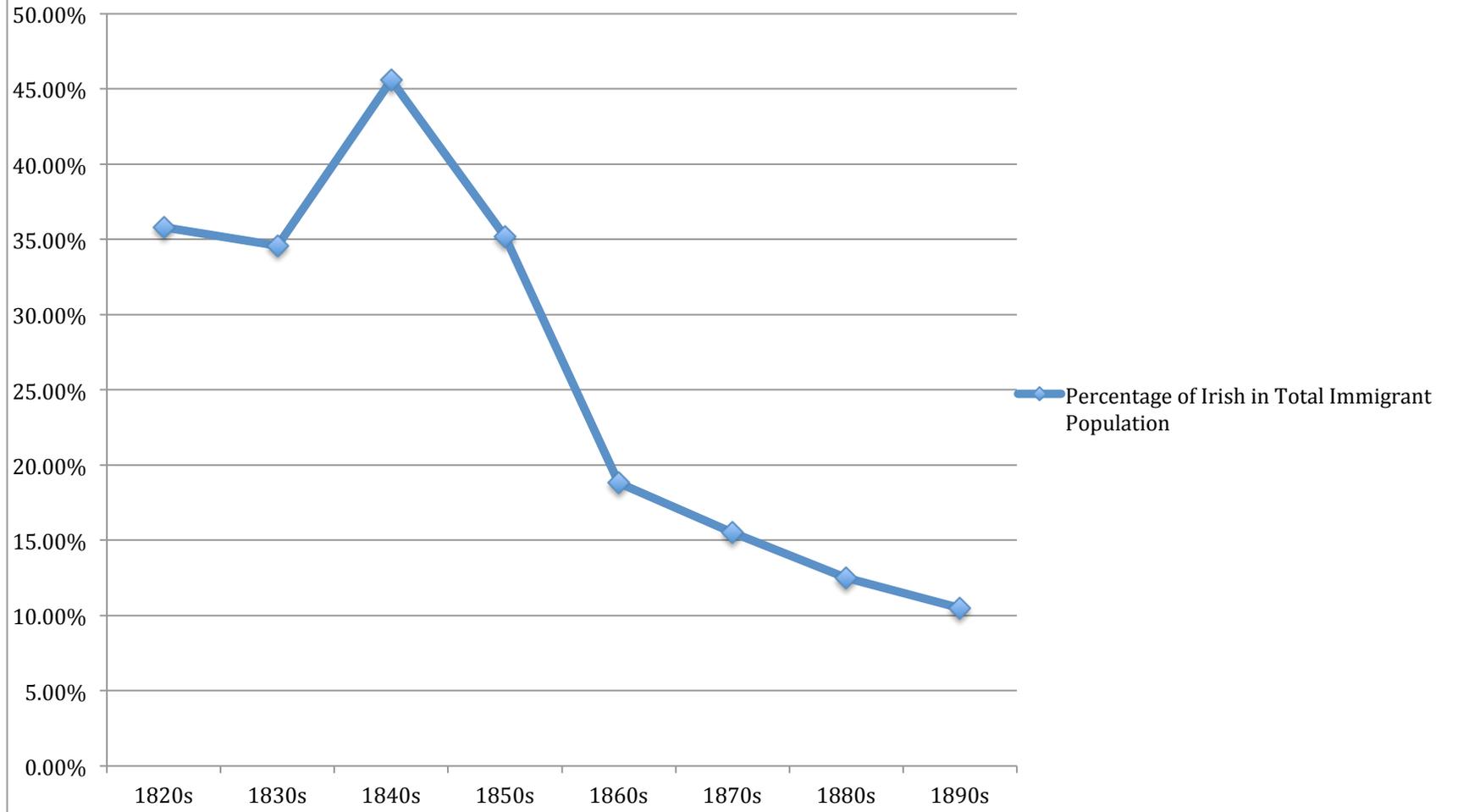
Number of Irish Immigrants Over Time



Number of Irish Immigrants Over Time (Line Graph for Comparison)



Percentage of Irish in Total Immigrant Population Over Time



**New York City Average Annual Population Turnover,
2010-2014**

Infographic inspired by Museum of the City of New York's
Future City Lab

*Data Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 2010-2014; New York City Dept. of City
Planning, 2016.*

