

Where  
the past  
is present

# DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## TEACHER RESOURCE LESSON PLAN

### MIGRATION TO SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson was originally published in *Telling Detroit's Story: Historic Past, Proud People, Shining Future* curriculum unit developed by the Detroit 300 Commission in 2001.

Through looking at and studying primary and secondary sources, students in ninth through twelfth grades will gain a deeper understanding of the role immigration has played in Detroit's history and the diversity in Southeastern Michigan.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Improve analytical skills.
- Develop an historical hypothesis.
- Develop an understanding of the diverse ethnic make-up of Southeastern Michigan.

#### MATERIALS USED

- Reading: "Migration to Southeast Michigan"
- Chart: "Selected Population Data for Detroit and Michigan, 1890-1990"
- Reading: "Narratives of Immigrants"
- Chart: "Employees, Highland Park Plant, Ford Motor Company, January 12, 1917"
- Chart: "State of Birth, Detroit and Michigan Residents"
- Worksheet: "Analyzing Data"

#### LESSON SEQUENCE

##### Opening the Activity:

1. Have the students read "Migration to Southeast Michigan."
2. Discuss the role various ethnic groups played in the development of Southeast Michigan.

#### Developing the Activity

1. Have the students form small groups. Distribute "Selected Population Data for Detroit and Michigan, 1890-1990."
2. Based on the charts, have each group develop three hypotheses regarding population changes in Detroit from 1890-1990.
3. Discuss the various theories regarding Detroit's population based on the chart.

#### Concluding the Activity

4. Distribute the reading: "Narratives of Immigrants."
5. Have the students read and discuss reasons immigrants came to this area.
6. Have the students develop relationships between their hypotheses and the writings of immigrants or other available sources.

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students may be given other charts, such as "Employees, Highland Park Plant, Ford Motor Company, January 12, 1917" and "State of Birth, Detroit and Michigan Residents" to develop additional hypotheses regarding immigration to and population change in Detroit.

#### ASSESSING THE LEARNING

- Have the students develop charts that visually represent the ideas contained in their three hypotheses.
- Have the students complete the "Analyzing Data" worksheet.

## READING: MIGRATION TO SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

The United States is a nation of immigrants. With the exception of Native Americans, all of our ancestors arrived in this country within the past few hundred years.

The first European settlers arrived in Southeastern Michigan in 1701. These early Detroiters were French and under the command of Antoine Cadillac. Their primary goal was to build a fur trading post along the narrow strait we call the Detroit River. Their Native American allies built several villages near the French fort.

Following the French and Indian War, British traders arrived. While the British soon made up a large part of the population within the city walls, French farms were scattered along both sides of the Detroit River.

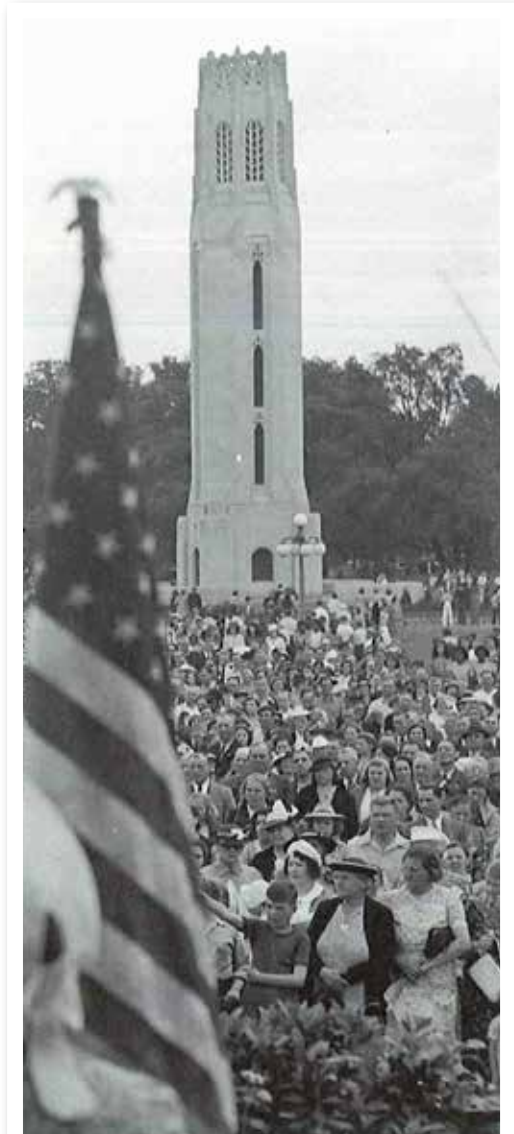
Detroit passed into American hands following the Revolutionary War. Slowly, Americans began to arrive. It was not until the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, however, that Detroit really began to grow. In an age in which travel by water was the easiest and fastest means of transportation, it was no wonder that most settlers arrived by way of Lake Erie. The typical Michigan settler was from upstate New York or New England. This migration of “Yankees and Yorkers” to Michigan continued through the 19th century.

The 1830s, and particularly the 1840s, saw large numbers of Irish and Germans arrive in Michigan. The Irish were usually poor Catholics who had left Ireland because of the potato famine of the 1840s. Germans were Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish and often middle-class. Many left Germany following a failed democratic revolution in 1848.

German and Irish immigrants continued to flock to America and Detroit throughout the 19th century. Detroit was also an important destination for English, Scottish, and Scandinavian immigrants. Canadians, however, were the largest immigrant group in Detroit throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. They were usually of British, Irish, or French extraction.

By 1880 immigration patterns began to change. Before 1880 most immigrants to the United States and Detroit came from northern and western Europe. Thereafter, eastern and southern Europeans dominated immigration until restrictive laws passed in the 1920s severely limited all immigration.

In Detroit, Polish immigrants from German-occupied Poland started to arrive in the 1870s. Immigrants also continued to arrive from Germany. Russians, Hungarians, Italians, Greeks and other European nationalities were



**Detroit Poles at a Patriotic Service at Belle Isle, 1940**

*Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University*

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## READING: MIGRATION TO SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

also drawn to Detroit. This migration was heavily Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish. The boom years of immigration, 1900-1914, coincided with the rapid expansion of the automobile industry in Detroit. While eastern and southern Europeans were the most significant nationalities coming to Detroit, the auto industry attracted people from all over Europe and the world.

The automobile industry also drew people from American farms. This was most dramatic during World War I and in the 1920s. Under the pressure of wartime production demands, farms became increasingly mechanized. As a result, small family and tenant farms became unprofitable. Farm workers from the midwestern and southern states came to Detroit. A simultaneous coal-mining slump attracted miners from Pennsylvania and Indiana.

African Americans from the southeast were a significant part of this migration. Although an African American community had existed in Detroit for more than 150 years, it was small. There were only 4,000 African Americans out of a total city population of 250,000 in 1900. By 1930, however, there were 120,000 African Americans living in Detroit.

Migration from American farms continued until the Great Depression began in 1929. For the next 11 years, Detroit experienced some of the worst economic conditions of any city in America. Migration to Detroit virtually stopped. It began again, however, as soon as Detroit began to convert to military production during World War II. Once again, the chief sources of labor for the war industries came from American farms. And once again the southern states were major contributors of workers.

In the post-war years, strict immigration laws had been periodically relaxed to accommodate displaced persons and refugees from various parts of the world. Europeans displaced by World War II and the Cold War were drawn to Detroit. Similar factors played an important part in attracting thousands of Arabic, Hispanic, Asian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese immigrants.



**Greek Men in a Detroit Coffee House, 1939**

*Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University*



**A Chinese Women's Club in Detroit, 1942**

*Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University*

# CHART: SELECTED POPULATION DATA FOR DETROIT AND MICHIGAN, 1890-1990

Selected Population Data - Southeastern Michigan, 1890 to 1990

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>Detroit Ethnic Groups</b>											
<b>Native Born</b>											
White	121,473	185,411	304,025	663,640	1,040,860	1,153,500	1,272,592	986,202	727,606	413,730	221,932
Negro	3,454	4,111	5,741	40,838	120,066	149,119	300,506	482,229	658,516	758,939	778,456
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,850	30,670	27,586
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>124,927</b>	<b>189,522</b>	<b>309,766</b>	<b>704,478</b>	<b>1,160,926</b>	<b>1,302,619</b>	<b>1,573,098</b>	<b>1,468,431</b>	<b>1,391,972</b>	<b>1,203,339</b>	<b>1,027,974</b>
<b>Foreign Born</b>											
Austria	658	471	14,000	10,700	5,898	7,992	6,503	2,152	727	236	
Belgium	411	671	3,200	6,219	8,969	6,890				141	
Canada	18,791	28,900	41,000	58,894	94,284	74,127	63,820	56,223	24,868	9,411	3,396
Czechoslovakia	513	612	3,351	6,291	4,080	4,080	4,150		1,599	386	117
England/Wales	7,253	6,300	9,200	17,169	28,636	21,049	17,015		10,636	1,789	1,124
France	804	589	1,740	2,333	1,639	1,639	1,616		624	263	167
Germany	35,481	32,000	44,000	30,328	32,716	23,785	17,046	17,754	6,377	3,156	1,330
Greece	4	4	4,628	6,385	5,476	5,476	5,526	4,278	2,768	1,338	428
Hungary	112	112	5,900	13,500	11,162	11,382	9,303	5,680	2,668	822	254
Ireland	7,447	6,400	5,500	7,004							
Ireland - Free State					6,293	4,760	5,458		1,574	680	164
Ireland - Northern					3,524	2,211	322		72		
Italy	338	905	5,700	16,205	28,581	26,277	24,496	18,721	11,795	4,434	783
Lithuania				2,653	4,879	4,142	3,692	2,904	1,632		152
Mexico	9			4,886	4,886	1,565	2,139	3,373	2,414	3,033	3,365
Netherlands	327	297	1,861	2,092	1,711	1,711	1,331	5,755	715	227	40
Palestine/Syria				1,877	3,224	2,927		2,790			
Poland	5,351	14,000	56,600	66,113	66,113	52,235	44,611	30,035	16,649	7,077	2,475
Romania				4,668	7,576	5,109	3,723	2,123	1,579		1,333
Russia	669	1,332	18,000	27,279	21,781	20,251	19,154	4,791	5,521	2,237	590
Scandinavia and Finland	435	498	5,949	10,655	7,956	7,956	6,336		1,879	177	154
Scotland	2,459	2,500	3,300	6,933	23,546	17,061	14,182		1,455		
Yugoslavia				3,702	9,014	6,278	5,431		4,167	2,866	935
Asia									7,256	14,002	10,355
<b>Other Latin America</b>											
Other	647	491	6,200	7,940	38,818	11,930	20,611	47,286	11,425	11,021	6,951
<b>Subtotal Foreign Born</b>	<b>81,709</b>	<b>95,966</b>	<b>156,000</b>	<b>289,200</b>	<b>427,656</b>	<b>320,833</b>	<b>276,465</b>	<b>201,713</b>	<b>121,355</b>	<b>68,303</b>	<b>34,490</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>206,636</b>	<b>285,488</b>	<b>465,766</b>	<b>993,678</b>	<b>1,588,582</b>	<b>1,623,452</b>	<b>1,849,563</b>	<b>1,670,144</b>	<b>1,513,327</b>	<b>1,271,642</b>	<b>1,062,464</b>

# READING: NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRANTS

## Charles grew up on a poor farm in Austria-Hungary.

“I was born in what is now Czechoslovakia – it was Bohemia in those days. It was under Austrian-Hungarian rule. Franz Josef was the Emperor. We were a family of four girls and three boys with our mother. We lost our dad when I was six years old, and times were pretty tough for us. We were one of the poorest families in the village – probably a little over a thousand people lived there. We had a couple or three pieces of land that wouldn’t amount to more than two acres altogether – it was separated and in different places.

“There were farmers who had quite a bit of land and they lived pretty good, a lot better than the common ordinary man. And, of course, my older sisters and brothers, they worked in the factory up there, making rugs and stuff for a few dollars. It was hard for us to get along, but then mother was a good manager, and we just managed to struggle through it.

“In 1913, my brother, Joe, was scheduled to go into the army. He had his examination and everything. He was supposed to report, but instead, he and my brother-in-law left and went to the United States. They arranged things for us to come over to America, and we made it here. We came to this country in 1914. On my 14th birthday, we left for Prague.”

## Bessie’s family left Greece in 1909

“I lived outside of Athens, a small town, which is now bigger. I went to school until I came here. There were six kids in the family and we had a very happy life, like all the Greeks, until everybody in the family decided they wanted to come to the United States. Everybody was saying it was a land to make money, to have freedom, to do whatever you please – all those things, I guess.

“My father got the notion to come here with my older sister. They were here about a year – both of them worked – then they sent money for me and my brother. We came by ourselves. I was 11, my brother was two years older than I. We were both young kids, we weren’t like kids nowadays. We were different kids. We went to work. I came here and I went to work.

“We traveled with other people. You see, this man used to come to America, where he used to work sometimes. He made a trip back, and it didn’t cost him anything because we paid his fare to bring us here.”

## A Mexican poet describes the reasons people left Mexico in the 1920s

But those who are to blame are those unkind employers  
who don’t give their people enough to buy a jacket.

The peon is always burdened, is treated with cruelty;  
the rich would like to see his head where they see his feet.

I’m not criticizing the country, but certainly tell you  
that many of the laborers go naked to their navels.

They treat him like a slave, not always a useful servant  
who pours out for the rich his last drop of sweat.

The rich go in automobiles, riding a good horse and a good saddle,  
while the poor peons go about half-naked.

Here one works a year without earning enough for a shirt;  
the poor man suffers always the rich man laughs and laughs.

## An English potter from Stafford wrote in the 1840s:

“There is none of that lordly ship, as in England. Some of you are obliged to worship your masters, when meeting them on the road; I mean by almost plowing the road up, with bowing and scraping to them; and perhaps just as closely to the entrance of a place of worship. There’s no such thing here. I’ve seen men with double the amount of those you idolize, working by the side of

## READING: NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRANTS

their men, during the week, and, on Sunday, sitting by their side in a place of worship. The fine coat is thought of no more than the rough one.

### Pasquale describes why he left turn of the century Italy.

“Our people have to immigrate. It is a matter of too much boundless life and too little space... Every bit of cultivatable soil is owned by those fortunate few who lord over us. Before spring comes over our valley all the obtainable land is rented out or given to the peasants for the season under usurious conditions, namely for three-fourths, one-half or one-fourth of the crops... but now there was escape from the rich landowners, from the terrors of drought, the specter of starvation, in the boundless America out of which people return with fabulous tales and thousands of liras – riches unheard of before, among peasants.”

### A Pole living in the German controlled area of Poland before World War I

“We came from Poznan. That was under the Prussian regime at the time. We had schools, of course - we had to go there; but it was all in German. Some noble ladies tried to teach Polish at home. Police found our books; they captured the ladies, threw the books away, and put the ladies in jail so that no one could learn Polish. Everything was supposed to be in German. You had to speak German in the school, in the band or the post office or anywhere. The only way to learn Polish was at home – there, we spoke Polish.”

[Why did your parents decide to come to America?]

“First there were already rumors of war. My father had connections with so-called politicians – they were warning him. Number two, the business was very hard – my father had a bakery. The taxes were very high, so he decided to close up and come over to America. . .

“Also, we came here because it was getting harder; take, for instance, school. I was interested already in engineering, technical stuff like that. I applied to what was called a technical school. Well, they wouldn’t take me because my name was Polish. They said they were over-filled, which was not true, because other boys who went with me to regular school, they were German, so they were accepted. So we had all kinds of trouble.

### A Pole living in the Russian controlled area of Poland before World War I

“Oh, we had problems. We couldn’t do anything that we wanted. We didn’t even have a school there. The Russians didn’t care about teaching their children or us, so my parents used to bring a teacher to the house, or to the whole village. That was only during the winter, for a couple of months or so.

“My mother used to read Polish history to us. She would close the windows and teach us how to read, but what she did with the book later, we never knew. She had to hide it, because we weren’t permitted to learn anything about Poland.

“We couldn’t stand the Russian people – soldiers that is. We were running away from them. Soldiers were right on the edge of our home. Our parents never let us go alone, because they said they acted like savages.”

Sources for Immigrant Quotes:

- David M. Brownstone, Irene M. Franck, Douglass L. Brownstone. *Island of Hope, Island of Tears*. Rawson Wade Publishers, Inc., New York
- Lawrence A. Cardoso. *Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1897-1931, Socio-Economic Patterns*. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona.
- Dick Hoerder, Horst Rössler, ed. *Distant Magnets. Expectations and Reality in the Immigrant Experiences, 1840-1930*. Holmes and Meier, New York and London.

# CHART: EMPLOYEES, HIGHLAND PARK PLANT, FORD MOTOR COMPANY, JANUARY 12, 1917

Nationality	Number of Employees	Number of Employes With no Bank Accounts	Number of Employes With Bank Accounts	Amount in Banks	Average Amount Per Employee With Bank Account
1 American . . . . .	16,457	4,640	11,817	\$2,383,484.00	\$201.70
2 Polish . . . . .	7,525	2,555	4,970	1,977,098.00	397.81
3 Italian . . . . .	1,954	621	1,333	494,054.00	370.63
4 Canadian . . . . .	1,819	508	1,311	296,882.00	226.45
5 Roumanian . . . . .	1,750	431	1,319	647,541.00	490.93
6 Jewish . . . . .	1,437	408	1,029	282,243.00	274.29
7 German . . . . .	1,360	394	966	351,987.00	364.38
8 Russian . . . . .	1,160	221	939	529,395.00	563.79
9 English . . . . .	1,159	242	917	251,122.00	273.85
10 Hungarian . . . . .	690	196	494	173,294.00	350.80
11 Austrian . . . . .	573	181	392	130,834.00	333.76
12 Syrian . . . . .	555	133	422	273,683.00	648.54
13 Lithuanian . . . . .	541	114	427	162,875.00	381.44
14 Scotch . . . . .	480	110	370	100,325.00	271.15
15 Serbian . . . . .	456	118	338	176,098.00	521.00
16 Armenian . . . . .	437	107	330	239,043.00	724.37
17 Irish . . . . .	399	90	309	86,901.00	281.23
18 Ruthenian . . . . .	368	108	260	103,536.00	398.22
19 Greek . . . . .	281	53	228	99,386.00	435.90
20 Bohemian . . . . .	240	63	177	57,958.00	327.45
21 Swedish . . . . .	166	38	128	43,528.00	340.06
22 Croatian . . . . .	159	46	113	49,349.00	436.72
23 Finnish . . . . .	106	39	67	16,755.00	250.07
24 Negro . . . . .	106	39	67	10,229.00	152.67
25 Danish . . . . .	81	19	62	18,901.00	304.85
26 Hollander . . . . .	75	24	51	10,968.00	215.06
27 Maltese . . . . .	62	9	53	14,744.00	278.19
28 Bulgarian . . . . .	56	11	45	21,475.00	477.22
29 French . . . . .	55	12	43	13,339.00	310.21
30 Turkish . . . . .	50	5	45	42,356.00	941.24
31 Belgian . . . . .	48	12	36	10,559.00	293.31
32 Swiss . . . . .	39	7	32	8,024.00	250.75
33 Welsh . . . . .	39	14	25	4,919.00	196.76
34 Norwegian . . . . .	38	9	29	11,362.00	391.79
35 Indian (American) . . . . .	33	6	27	3,361.00	124.48
36 Arabian . . . . .	28	3	25	5,104.00	204.16
37 Spanish . . . . .	14	3	11	7,541.00	685.55
38 Macedonian . . . . .	14	2	12	3,386.00	282.17
39 Japanese . . . . .	13	2	11	5,123.00	465.73
40 Australian . . . . .	12	4	8	1,868.00	233.50
41 Albanian . . . . .	11	0	11	7,592.00	690.18
42 Egyptian . . . . .	8	0	8	1,903.00	237.88
43 Hindu . . . . .	8	0	8	2,530.00	316.25
44 Cuban . . . . .	8	2	6	1,106.00	184.33
45 Mexican . . . . .	7	1	6	1,727.00	287.83
46 Persian . . . . .	5	3	2	85.00	42.50
47 Argentinian . . . . .	3	2	1	65.00	65.00
48 Montenegrin . . . . .	3	1	2	454.00	227.00
49 Jamaican . . . . .	3	0	3	374.00	124.66
50 Chinese . . . . .	3	1	2	315.00	157.50
51 Brazilian . . . . .	2	0	2	818.00	409.00
52 Portuguese . . . . .	1	1	0	.....	.....
53 Manx . . . . .	1	1	0	.....	.....
54 Philippino . . . . .	1	0	1	5.00	5.00
55 Porto-Rican . . . . .	1	0	1	15.00	15.00
56 Luxemburger . . . . .	1	1	0	.....	.....
57 New Zealander . . . . .	1	1	0	.....	.....
58 Boer . . . . .	1	1	0	.....	.....
Total . . . . .	40,903	11,612	29,291	\$9,137,619.00	\$311.96

# CHART: STATE OF BIRTH, DETROIT AND MICHIGAN RESIDENTS

Region	State of Birth	Michigan Residents		Detroit Residents
		1950	1860	
		1950	1860	1880
New England	Maine	3,685	2,214	308
	New Hampshire	2,680	3,482	190
	Vermont	2,835	13,779	436
	Massachusetts	20,650	9,873	936
	Rhode Island	2,910	1,122	78
	Connecticut	7,740	7,636	377
Mid Atlantic	New York	79,670	191,128	7,799
	New Jersey	14,615	7,531	423
	Pennsylvania	137,160	17,460	1,088
E.N. Central	Ohio	189,920	34,235	2,093
	Indiana	116,465	4,482	359
	Illinois	155,965	2,167	596
	Michigan	4,101,260	294,828	53,651
	Wisconsin	60,125	1,908	299
W.N. Central	Minnesota	32,120	133	53
	Iowa	29,025	353	116
	Missouri	57,555	164	149
	North Dakota	8,335		
	South Dakota	7,170		5
	Nebraska	10,330		15
	Kansas	15,805	18	38
South Atlantic	Delaware	1,155	515	44
	Maryland	7,185	710	195
	District of Columbia	3,065	54	
	Virginia	17,000	2,176	396
	West Virginia	28,600		17
	North Carolina	16,855	532	44
	South Carolina	17,740	105	53
	Georgia	65,715	79	32
	Florida	12,470	26	12
E.S. Central	Kentucky	86,505	1,054	404
	Tennessee	93,365	196	111
	Alabama	72,625	40	35
	Mississippi	50,000	55	37
	W.S. Central			
	Arkansas	53,195	13	14
	Louisiana	16,250	81	63
	Oklahoma	13,230		
	Texas	27,155	22	33
Mountain	Montana	3,560		
	Idaho	1,525		
	Wyoming	1,315		
	Colorado	6,755		7
	New Mexico	1,280		
	Arizona	1,375		1
	Utah	1,460		
	Nevada	450		1
Pacific	Washington	5,095		
	Oregon	2,245		2
	California	11,745	210	38
Other	Alaska	240		
	Hawaii	770		
	Puerto Rico	1,120		
	Other	965	1,632	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,678,030</b>	<b>600,013</b>	<b>70,548</b>



# WORKSHEET: ANALYZING DATA

Data Element Number \_\_\_\_\_

Assume that the data element is to be displayed in a Michigan history textbook as a part of a chapter called, "The People of Detroit." Write an appropriate title and caption as it would appear in the book.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Caption: \_\_\_\_\_

The document you have helps answer some questions about the migration of people to Detroit. However, it probably raises others. Review the document and write one historical question suggested by the data. Your question may relate to the document as a whole or focus on a small piece.

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Speculate the answer to your questions. This is a hypothesis.

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Identify a specific fact that would tend to support or refute your hypothesis.

Write it in the form of an "If...then..." statement.

(That is: If [your hypothesis] then [this fact would be true.]

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Identify a possible primary source item in which the fact you identified in question 4 might be found. Be creative. You will not need to find this document. It is only important that it might have existed.

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# WORKSHEET: ANALYZING DATA (TEACHER SAMPLE)

Data Element Number 1

Assume that the data element is to be displayed in a Michigan history textbook as a part of a chapter called, "The People of Detroit." Write an appropriate title and caption as it would appear in the book.

Title: **National Origins of Detroit Residents, 1890-1990**

Caption: **European-born national groups made up a significant percentage of Detroit's population for most of the past 100 years.**

The document you have helps answer some questions about the migration of people to Detroit. However, it probably raises others. Review the document and write one historical questions suggested by the data. Your question may relate to the document as a whole or focus on a small piece.

**Since Canadians are immigrants as well, what was the original nationality of the large Canadian population that came to that country?**

Speculate the answer to your questions. This is a hypothesis.

**Since Canada was part of the British Empire, most Canadians were probably from Britain originally.**

Identify a specific fact that would tend to support or refute your hypothesis.

Write it in the form of an "If...then..." statement.

(That is: If [your hypothesis] then [this fact would be true.])

**If most Canadians who migrated to the United States had British ancestry, then the last names of Canadian immigrants would be British sounding.**

Identify a possible primary source item in which the fact you identified in question 4 might be found. Be creative. You will not need to find this document. It is only important that it might have existed.

**The immigration services would have the names of all people who immigrated to the United States and their country of origin.**