



Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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Columbus Day in Pennsylvania: A Glance at Pennsylvania's Heritage

PENN STATE HARRISBURG – Columbus Day (October 11, 2010) honors Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, whose three fabled ships commissioned by Queen Isabella of Spain landed on American shores in 1492. The momentous voyage, celebrated since colonial times as the birth of a New World, became an official federal holiday in 1934. The observance of Columbus Day offers an opportunity to celebrate the immigration of settlers to America. The mass immigration of people from all over the world has helped the United States of America become one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world.

Pennsylvanian's Immigrant Ancestors

Since the time of Columbus' contact with the New World, scores of immigrants have made the journey to America in search of a better life. Pennsylvania shares the nation's rich history of immigration, which is reflected by the ancestry of its residents. In October of 1683, Germantown, Pennsylvania became the first permanent German settlement in what was to become America. Fittingly, German remains the most common ancestry group cited by Pennsylvanians: 22.6 percent or 3,567,312 people, according to the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS). Other groups, Irish, and Italian were the next most frequently reported ancestry groups in Pennsylvania in 2009. Over 2.6 million persons identified themselves as being a part of the "Other" ancestry groups category, while Irish accounted for nearly 2.3 million persons and Italian accounted for over 1.5 million persons (see Figure 1). The Census Bureau is prohibited from collecting information on religion; therefore, respondents who named a religious affiliation as their ancestry were coded in the "Other" category. A total of 170,103 Pennsylvanians also identified themselves as "Pennsylvania German," while 530,931 people marked simply "American" as their ethnicity.

Native American Race Groups in Pennsylvania

Overall, there were 28,593 people in Pennsylvania with American Indian and Alaska Native as their race group in Pennsylvania, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates. This figure accounts for only 0.2 percent of the population, ranking Pennsylvania last among all 50 states in the percent of its population that is Native American.

Figure 1. Most Common Ancestry Groups in Pennsylvania, 2009		
Ancestry	Number	Percent of Total Population
German	3,567,312	22.6%
Other groups	2,661,273	16.9%
Irish	2,297,426	14.6%
Italian	1,592,919	10.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates



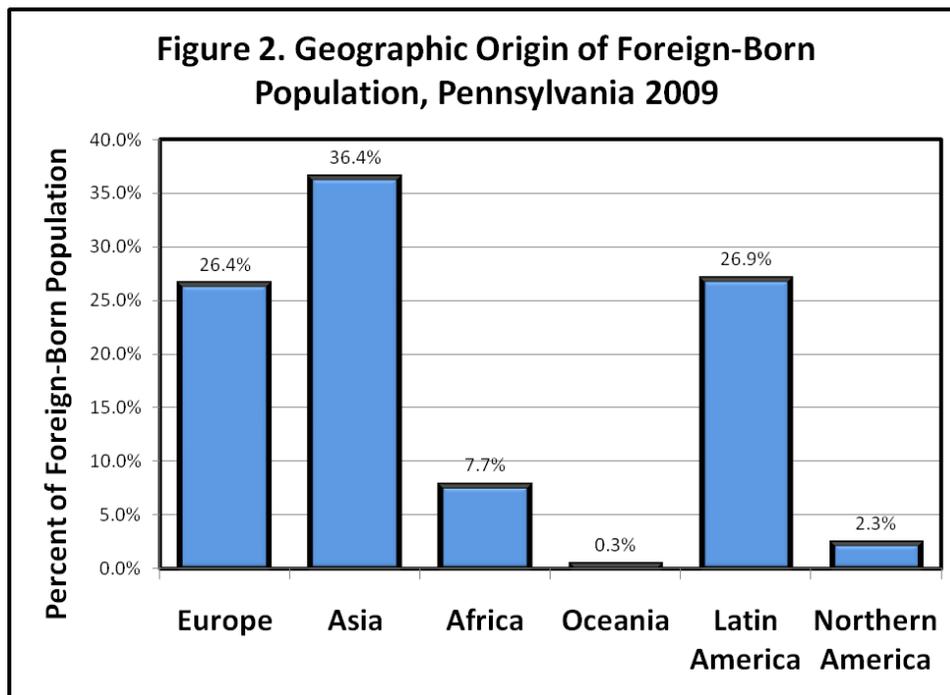
Pennsylvania's Foreign Born Population

The U.S. Census Bureau defines the foreign-born population as anyone who was not a U.S. citizen at birth. This includes respondents who indicated they were a U.S. citizen by naturalization or not a U.S. citizen. Pennsylvania's foreign-born population totaled 691,242 according to the 2009 ACS, an increase of 182,951 since 2000. The foreign-born population today makes up 5.5 percent of Pennsylvania's total population, ranking it 30th among the states. The foreign-born population is growing at a much faster rate than the population born in the United States (36.0 percent increase versus 1.2 percent increase) since 2000. Over a third (35.5 percent) of the foreign-born population entered the commonwealth in 2000 or later.

The regions of the world contributing the most foreign-born to Pennsylvania include Asia (36.4 percent), Latin America (26.9 percent), and Europe (26.4 percent). Figure 2 illustrates the foreign-born population by region of birth in Pennsylvania

Immigration & Migration

Immigration continues today: while the commonwealth ranks 4th among states in native born population (74.6%), Pennsylvania gained 18,480 residents from international migration between 2008 and 2009, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates. In addition to those who moved from abroad, Pennsylvania added 1,346 residents due to migration from other states over the same time period.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Annual Population Estimates, 2009 Vintage; 2009 American Community Survey.

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth's official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau's National State Data Center Program.

Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center's State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg's Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.