8th Grade Lesson
Changing Faces, Structural Realities: The 1965 Act and Georgia's Modern Population
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GA Standards

GSE SS8H12: Explain the importance of developments in Georgia since the late 20th century. (Specifically focusing on how post-1965 immigration transformed Georgia's modern cultural landscape, demographic shift, and economic development).

Background Information

To understand modern Georgia, middle school students must analyze the structural shift caused by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act). Historically, Georgia's demographics were primarily defined by a rigid Black-and-White racial binary. Anti-Asian immigration policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917, and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 (which capped immigration from any Asian country to a flat 100 people per year) intentionally kept the Asian American population in the U.S. small, and virtually nonexistent in the South.



When the 1965 Act abolished these racist national quotas, it triggered a revolution that federal lawmakers completely failed to anticipate. President Lyndon B. Johnson downplayed the bill to a nervous public, famously reassuring them it was "not a revolutionary bill" and would not "reshape the structure of our daily lives".

Yet, the law reshaped Georgia entirely. While the act reserved 75% of visas for family reunification, it allocated 20% for professional skills and economic preferences. During the Cold War, the U.S. government used this economic preference to recruit highly educated "knowledge workers" (scientists, doctors, engineers) from Asian nations to out-compete global adversaries.



This structural filtering system directly engineered the "model minority" stereotype—a harmful myth portraying Asian Americans as a universally wealthy, law-abiding, and high-achieving monolith. This stereotype is highly damaging because it masks severe economic disparities among diverse Asian ethnic groups. For instance, while highly skilled "knowledge workers" arrived with corporate sponsorships, Asian refugees fleeing war and destabilization entered under a tiny, underfunded 5% visa allocation without institutional wealth. Furthermore, white-dominated political structures historically weaponized this engineered success to break racial solidarity, falsely claiming that the American system was free of racism and that the struggles of

Black communities were due to cultural faults rather than systemic inequities.

In Georgia, these federal preferences intersected directly with the state's late-20th-century economic boom (SS8H12). As Georgia expanded into international business, tech, and healthcare hubs (particularly around metro Atlanta), the state attracted an immense share of these high-skilled professional and family-reunified immigrants. According to census and Pew Research data, the Asian American population in Georgia has grown by thousands of percentage points since 1965, becoming one of the fastest-growing demographics in the state and completely redefining Georgia's political, cultural, and economic landscape.

Suggested Teaching Activity

Step 1: Documenting Federal Intent vs. Regional Reality (15 Minutes)

1. Provide students with the 1965 statement from President Lyndon B. Johnson claiming the act would not "reshape the structure of our daily lives".
2. Display a US census data of GA population by race from 1790-1990. The GA data is in Table 25 at page 53.

Table 25. Georgia - Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990
(See text for sources, definitions, and explanations)

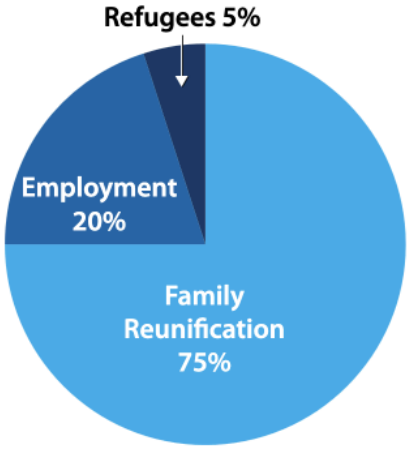
Census year	Total population	Race					Hispanic origin (of any race)	White, not of Hispanic origin
		White	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut	Asian and Pacific Islander	Other race		
NUMBER								
1990	6 478 216	4 600 148	1 746 565	13 348	75 781	42 374	108 922	4 543 425
Sample	6 478 216	4 603 396	1 744 882	15 283	73 757	40 898	101 379	4 549 759
1980	5 463 105	3 947 135	1 465 181	7 616	24 457	18 716	61 260	3 914 084
Sample	5 463 105	3 949 583	1 464 435	10 079	26 009	12 999	60 974	3 915 556
1970	4 589 575	3 391 242	1 187 149	2 347	5 946	2 891	(NA)	(NA)
15% sample [1]	4 589 569	3 396 834	1 184 081	2 236	(NA)	(NA)	29 824	3 369 745
5% sample	4 589 575	3 394 857	1 186 959	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	45 289	3 363 181
1960	3 943 116	2 817 223	1 122 596	749	2 004	544	(NA)	(NA)
1950	3 444 578	2 380 577	1 062 762	333	782	124	(NA)	(NA)
1940 [2]	3 123 723	2 038 278	1 084 927	106	412	(X)	*419*	*2 037 859*
5% sample [2]	(NA)	2 045 100	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(X)	420	2 044 680
1930	2 908 506	1 837 021	1 071 125	43	317	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1920	2 895 832	1 689 114	1 206 365	125	228	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1910	2 609 121	1 431 802	1 176 987	95	237	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1900	2 216 331	1 181 294	1 034 813	19	205	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1890 [3]	1 837 353	978 357	858 815	68	113	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1890 [4]	1 837 353	978 357	858 815	68	113	(X)	(NA)	(NA)
1880	1 542 180	816 906	725 133	124	17	Black		
1870	1 184 109	638 926	545 142	40	1	Total	Free	Slave
1860	1 057 286	591 550	465 698	38	-	465 698	3 500	462 198
1850	906 185	521 572	384 613	(NA)	(NA)	384 613	2 931	381 682
1840	691 392	407 695	283 697	(NA)	(NA)	283 697	2 753	280 944
1830	516 823	296 806	220 017	(NA)	(NA)	220 017	2 486	217 531
1820	340 989	189 570	151 419	(NA)	(NA)	151 419	1 763	149 656
1810	251 407	144 450	106 957	(NA)	(NA)	106 957	1 799	105 158
1800	162 686	102 261	60 425	(NA)	(NA)	60 425	1 019	59 406
1790	82 548	52 886	29 662	(NA)	(NA)	29 662	398	29 264

3. Also display demographic data showcasing Georgia's AAPI population today.
4. Have students work in pairs to answer:
    - How does the data regarding Georgia's modern population growth contradict President Johnson's prediction?
    - Why would a federal policy change in Washington, D.C. have such a delayed but massive impact on a state like Georgia?

Step 2: Decoding the 20% Preference Filter (20 Minutes)

1. Display a pie chart showing the Hart-Celler Act's visa breakdown (75% Family, 20% Economic/Skills, 5% Refugee).

Pie Chart of the Hart-Celler Act (1965), which set a 20,000-person cap per country.



2. Have students analyze modern H1-B skill-based visa statistics by industry (e.g., technology, medical, engineering), connecting these sectors directly to major corporations and industries driving Georgia's modern economy (SS8H12).

Occupational Category	H1-B visa petitions approved in 2019
Computer-related occupations	256,226
Occupation in Architecture, Engineering, and Surveying	39,070
Occupation in Administrative Specializations	22,125
Occupations in Education	19,850
Occupations in Medicine and Health	15,233
Occupations in Mathematics and Physical Sciences	11,642
Occupations in Life Sciences	6,334
Managers and Officials, Other	4,618
Miscellaneous Professional, Technical, and Managerial Occupations	4,162
Occupations in Social Sciences	3,665
Occupations in Art	2,209
Occupations in Law and Jurisprudence	1,344
Occupations in Writing	460
Miscellaneous (e.g., systems analysis and programming, computer-related occupations)	226
Occupations in Museum, Library, and Archival Sciences	144
Occupations in Entertainment and Recreation	128
Occupations in Religion and Theology	54
Sale Promotion Occupations	2

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report to Congress

3. Facilitate a whole-class discussion using these prompts:
    - How did the 20% economic preference category act as a "filter" for who was allowed to enter the country?
    - How does this targeted, skill-based immigration policy explain the creation of the "model minority" myth?
    - Why is the "model minority" label a harmful myth rather than a compliment? How does it hide the struggles of refugees or low-income workers, and how has it been used historically to divide different communities of Color?

Images used:

1. Yoichi Okamoto, Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1965 Immigration And Nationality Act on Liberty Island, NY. Public Domain via LBJ Presidential Library
2. Kim, Esther June and Anna Falkner. “Handouts: Not Your Model Minority: An Inquiry on the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965” in Social Studies and the Young Learner (Jan/Feb 2022)
3. “Those Asian-American Whiz Kids,” in Time Magazine 130, no. 9 (August 31, 1987).