

Mediterranean Roots in Midwestern Soil: Uncovering an American Heritage



The Midwest is often thought of as a region of cornfields and small towns, but there is a hidden layer to its history and culture that is deeply rooted in the Mediterranean. From the early days of European exploration and settlement, Mediterranean immigrants have brought their traditions, customs, and cuisine to the Midwest, leaving an enduring legacy that can be seen in everything from the region's architecture to its food and social fabric.

The Early Years: Immigration and Assimilation

The first Mediterranean immigrants to arrive in the Midwest were French fur traders and missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries. They were followed by Italian, Greek, and Lebanese immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, who came to work in the region's mines, factories, and farms.



Milwaukee's Italian Heritage: Mediterranean Roots in Midwestern Soil (American Heritage) by Anthony M. Zignego

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These early immigrants faced many challenges as they tried to assimilate into American society. They often spoke little or no English, and they were discriminated against because of their ethnicity and religion. However, they also brought with them a rich cultural heritage that they were determined to preserve.

Mediterranean Influence on Midwestern Cuisine

One of the most obvious ways that Mediterranean culture has influenced the Midwest is through its cuisine. The region is home to some of the best Italian, Greek, and Lebanese restaurants in the country. These restaurants

have introduced Midwesterners to a variety of new flavors and dishes, from pasta and pizza to hummus and baklava.

Mediterranean cuisine has also had a significant impact on Midwestern home cooking. Many Midwestern families now regularly cook dishes such as spaghetti and meatballs, moussaka, and tabbouleh. These dishes have become so popular that they are now considered to be part of the region's culinary heritage.

Mediterranean Architecture in the Midwest

Another way that Mediterranean culture has influenced the Midwest is through its architecture. Many Midwestern cities and towns are home to beautiful Mediterranean-style buildings, from churches and schools to homes and businesses.

These buildings are often characterized by their white stucco walls, red tile roofs, and arched windows and doorways. They reflect the Mediterranean immigrants' desire to create a sense of home in their new surroundings.

Mediterranean Social Fabric in the Midwest

Mediterranean culture has also had a significant impact on the Midwest's social fabric. Mediterranean immigrants have brought with them a strong sense of family and community. They have also introduced Midwesterners to new traditions and customs, such as the importance of olive oil and wine in Mediterranean cuisine.

Today, Mediterranean immigrants and their descendants are an integral part of Midwestern society. They have helped to shape the region's culture

and identity in countless ways. Their legacy is a reminder of the rich diversity of American heritage.

The Mediterranean influence on the Midwest is a fascinating and complex story. It is a story of immigration, assimilation, and cultural exchange. It is also a story of how one region of the world has been shaped by the traditions and customs of another.

The legacy of the Mediterranean in the Midwest is a rich and enduring one. It is a legacy that can be seen in the region's cuisine, architecture, and social fabric. It is a legacy that is a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit.



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