

# Irish-American Identity, Memory, and Americanism During the Eras of the Civil War and First World War

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IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND AMERICANISM DURING THE ERAS OF  
THE CIVIL WAR AND FIRST WORLD WAR

by

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ABSTRACT  
IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND AMERICANISM DURING THE ERAS OF  
THE CIVIL WAR AND FIRST WORLD WAR

John A. French

Marquette University, 2012

This dissertation connects the well-documented history of the repression of wartime dissent in the United States with the complex relationship between Americans and immigrants. The study focuses specifically on Irish-American efforts to insulate themselves from accusations of unpatriotic and un-American attitudes and behaviors by highlighting their uniquely American contributions and principles. The Civil War and First World War eras provide ideal time frames for such an evaluation. Marked by xenophobia and institutionalized nativism, each era found many Americans and government officials accusing the American Irish of disloyalty because of their opposition to the prosecution of the war. In order to justify their positions, Irish-American leaders (prominent newspaper editors, historians, and those involved in Irish-American nationalistic organizations who consciously sought to sway both mainstream American *and* Irish-American sensibilities) propagated the notion that the American Irish were in fact the most American citizens. They turned the tables on nativists by labeling them and their politics as *un-American*. They used their memory of the American Revolution to sanction these ideas, tailoring their interpretation of American history to fit the circumstances they faced.

During the Civil War, this meant adapting Revolutionary rhetoric to justify their Copperhead politics and unfavorably contrast Republicans with the Founding Fathers. During the First World War, Irish-American notables equated the American Revolution with the contemporary situation in Ireland, arguing for absolute Irish autonomy. Furthermore, Irish-American champions asserted that it had actually been Irish Catholics that dominated the ranks of the Continental Army and thus were primarily responsible for freeing the American colonies from British dominion. By promulgating this collective memory, Irish-American luminaries simultaneously positioned themselves as especially American and argued that the United States owed the Irish people an Irish republic modeled on the United States. My study, therefore, expands on traditional paradigms for understanding assimilation and Americanization. Analyzing how immigrants responded to accusations of disloyalty during distinct American wars not only informs our understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States but also elucidates what it has meant to be an American in these times of crisis.

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## CHAPTER I – “WHAT THE HELL DO I HAVE TO DO TO BE CALLED AN AMERICAN?” THE WARTIME IRISH AND AMERICANIZATION

### Introduction

When a Boston newspaper called Joseph P. Kennedy an Irishman, he grumbled “I was born here. My children were born here. What the hell do I have to do to be called an American?” Yet many Americans also took offense that the American Irish cleaved to their heritage at all, arguing that many Irishmen identified more with Ireland than with America, making them un-American foreigners. An example of a passive-aggressive form of this nativism occurred in May 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson dedicated a monument to Revolutionary War hero Commodore John Barry. He praised Barry as an Irishman whose “heart crossed the Atlantic with him,” as opposed to those contemporary Irish-Americans who “need hyphens in their names because only part of them has come over.” Many in the Irish-American community reacted angrily to the questioning of their American patriotism, pointing out that they had served the country admirably dating back to its very founding and had incurred overwhelming casualties in defense of the United States in all its major wars. Nevertheless, the president of the United States, who belonged to the same political party as the vast majority of the American Irish, did not consider them fully American. By comparing the experiences of Irish-Americans in the Civil War era and the First World War era, this paper will help elucidate what it meant to be an American for Irish Americans in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation connects the well-documented history of the repression of wartime dissent in the United States with the complex relationship between Americans

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph P. Kennedy quoted in William V. Shannon, *The American Irish: A Political and Social Portrait* (Amherst: University of Amherst Press, 1963), xiii; Woodrow Wilson quoted in Shannon, 329.

and immigrants. It focuses specifically on Irish-American efforts to shield themselves from wartime accusations of unpatriotic and un-American attitudes and behaviors by highlighting their specifically American contributions and principles. The Civil War era and First World War era provide ideal time frames for such evaluations. In each politically-charged period, many Americans and government officials accused the American Irish of disloyalty because of their opposition to the government. Both eras were marked by xenophobia and institutionalized nativism. In order to justify their positions, Irish-American leaders propagated the notion that the Irish were in fact the *most* American citizens. They turned the tables on American nativists by labeling them and their politics as *un-American*. They used their memory of the American Revolution to confirm these ideas, and they tailored them to fit the circumstances they faced. During the Civil War, this meant adapting Revolutionary rhetoric to justify their Copperhead politics and unfavorably contrast Republicans with the Founding Fathers. During the First World War, Irish-American leaders compared the American Revolution to the predicament in Ireland in the late 1910s and early 1920s. They then used the legacy of the American Revolution to argue for full and complete Irish freedom. Furthermore, Irish-American leaders asserted that it had actually been Irish Catholics that dominated the ranks of the Continental Army and thus were primarily responsible for freeing the American colonies from British dominion. By promulgating this collective memory, Irish-American leaders simultaneously positioned themselves as especially American (for their critical role in the Revolutionary War, as well as their memory of their undaunted and unwavering service to the Union war effort during the American Civil War) and argued that the United States owed the Irish people an Irish republic modeled on the

United States. My study, therefore, expands on traditional paradigms for understanding the issues of assimilation and Americanization. Analyzing how immigrants responded to accusations of disloyalty during separate American wars not only informs our understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States but also elucidates what it has meant to be an American in times of crisis.

As has been well documented by historians, Irish immigrants to the United States have struggled tremendously to achieve full acceptance as American citizens (the Irish are clearly not alone in facing this challenge to their citizenship). The mere concept of what it means to be an American has evolved a great deal over the course of the country's history, with issues of race, ethnicity, religion, patriotism, politics, and culture figuring notably in how "American" particular groups of people considered themselves, as well as how American the "native" Americans perceived them to be. The Irish were white, but many "native" Americans discriminated against them because of their supposedly un-American qualities: their numinous religion, their seemingly disjointed national loyalties, the parochial nature of their politics, and their heathen culture. Determining how each of these supposed Irish-American qualities contributed to their tenuous hold on American nationality (and more importantly, how they pushed back against these un-American labels) during both the American Civil War era and the First World War era will help illuminate how the very concept of what it meant to be an American changed as the country moved from an isolated, agrarian nation of thirty-five million people in 1860 to the urban and industrial world power of over one hundred million people in 1920. While scholars have argued about the evolution of the Americanization of the Irish in the United States over lengthy periods and snapshots have been taken of the Irish-American

experience in specific eras or locations, never have these two crucial periods been evaluated in relation to one another. By looking at the concept of what it meant to be an American through the prism of the Irish experience in these two tumultuous eras, much can be learned about the relationship between patriotism and identity politics in wartime America. During these war periods, Irish leaders attempted to construct an Irish-American sensibility steeped in their perceived contributions to American history and their construction of the “un-American.” Their circumstances and political ends had changed by the First World War, but Irish leaders pursued similar strategies in fortifying and promulgating their Americanism.

The Famine Irish were branded as un-American and disloyal from their arrival in America. In the late 1840s, the “Famine Irish” quickly found themselves the victims of a brutal nativist campaign, which culminated with the Know-Nothing Party’s substantial gains in the mid-1850s. While they fiercely opposed Lincoln’s election, they turned out in droves to support his war effort. The American Irish died en masse for their newly-adopted country, hoping to earn the respect of their comrades and earn their red, white, and blue stripes. After becoming disenchanted with the direction of Union war aims because of the escalation of Irish casualties and the controversial Emancipation Proclamation, the Irish largely withdrew from the war effort.

In an attempt to shield themselves from being tabbed as unpatriotic, many Famine-era Irish leaders claimed that they were in fact more American than were their political opponents. While they lobbied for an easy path to citizenship and equality for all, the Irish also claimed that Irish Catholics were inherently more American than anyone else by virtue of their special affinity with Jeffersonian politics and their

contributions to the founding of the country itself. They had selective memory of their wartime experiences in the decades following the war and used this selective communal reminiscences to paint a picture of unrelenting bravery and support for the Union in order to bolster Irish claims of a more sacred bond with America than anyone else had.

A half-century later, the Irish again found themselves at odds with an American president and his wartime agenda. They protested Wilson's "isolationism" vehemently, easily recognizing that Wilson's isolationism was really a calculated war policy inching the country progressively closer to a full-fledged alliance with England, the great Irish nemesis. The movement for an Ireland free from English rule was intensifying overseas, and many prominent members of Irish America opposed England in the war, to varying degrees. Irish nationalists now had organizations supporting Sinn Fein (an Irish political faction devoted to total Irish independence from Britain), and many of these radicals hoped to incite an Irish rebellion during the First World War while England was distracted by fighting on the European mainland. When a rebellion did materialize in the ill-fated 1916 Easter Rising, the brutality of the English response united moderate and radical Irish-American nationalists (as well as most other Americans) against the British. The First World War channeled and focused Irish-American nationalism. The movement had been marked by incoherence for decades. However, the prospect of freedom made the group more cogent, and the Easter Rising radicalized it. A classic Gellnerian Diaspora nationalism, Irish Americans contributed over ten million dollars to independence movements in Ireland and joined nationalistic societies in unprecedented numbers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Brundage, "In Time of Peace, Prepare for War': Key Themes in the Social Thought of New York's Irish Nationalists, 1890-1916," in *The New York Irish*, Timothy J. Meagher and Ronald H. Bayor

Irish leaders further implored Wilson to stay out of the war and cease aiding the Allies, but when Wilson went to war in April of 1917, they begrudgingly supported the war effort, just as they had during the Civil War. After the war, they opposed the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations as defending the status quo in Europe, yet they framed their opposition strictly in American terms. To insulate themselves from charges of disloyalty or unpatriotic sentiments, they claimed that the document and its supporters were un-American and that it compromised the integrity and autonomy of the United States. The American Irish proclaimed that by opposing the war effort and peace treaty, they were actually defending American values and principles. By this period, the American Irish used their collective memory of their service and support of the Union during the Civil War to bolster their credentials as unequivocal American patriots. Far more strenuously, Irish leaders emphasized their many, varied, and unusual contributions to the founding of the country during the Revolutionary War era as proof that they, more than anyone else, understood what constituted proper Americanism. The evolution of their Americanism had traced the arc of America's role in the world. By this time, the Irish sought to expand American principles to oppressed peoples everywhere, especially the Irish. The United States had gone from a sanctuary to a soldier of freedom for all peoples, but especially the Irish, whom they claimed had a special connection with the American values of liberty and justice.

A great many parallels exist between the manners in which the Irish justified their dissent during each war. In both cases, they claimed a special linkage with the Founding Fathers and with the principles they espoused. This made the Irish more American than

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(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 321-334. See also Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); F.M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1923: A Study in Opinion and Policy* (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 55-58.

those who were questioning their loyalty to America. To affirm their superior American qualities and credentials, the Irish labeled their rivals as un-American by using their version of American history against them. During the Civil War, they employed the words of the Founding Fathers to sanction their seemingly radical opposition to Republican war policies. By the First World War era, the Irish were adopting the rhetoric and principles of the American Revolution on behalf of the struggle for Irish freedom. They argued that since the Irish had freed the United States from the yoke of British oppression, a return of the favor was long overdue. Through Irish-American eyes, being Irish and being American had come to mean the same thing. While anyone who embraced American principles was an American (regardless of where he or she lived in the world), the Irish were the most American by virtue of their supposedly unprecedented contributions to the founding and maintenance of the American Union. They attacked the Americanism of nativists by using the Irish-American version of U.S. history against them.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have long debated the process of how the Irish evolved into Americans (from a number of different angles). Many of these general studies of the Irish have also focused on the process by which they integrated into American society or remained aloof and parochial. William Shannon argued that the American Irish ideologically embraced American democracy to become American; it was their politics that helped them become Americans. Shannon focused mostly on the Irish experience in the northeastern United States, and he paints the picture of a politically pragmatic group who attained power in politics because it was the best avenue for achieving social and economic advancement.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Edward Cuddy, this Irish-American push for freedom actually backfired, as it ignited a nativist backlash against the Irish – see Edward Cuddy, “The Irish Question and the Revival of Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s,” *Catholic Historical Review* 67, no. 2(April 1981): 236-255.

Shannon also keys in on a number of well-known Irish-American priests, politicians, and celebrities in this fine sociological portrait of the Irish community. According to Joseph P. O'Grady, the American experience magnified the Irish love of Ireland and hatred of England. Famine immigrants who left their home only because of the threat of starvation were crammed into ghettos on the eastern seaboard, and this experience left them nostalgic for their homeland but also increasingly angry at the British for forcing their migration to begin with. As Irish migrations eventually ground to a trickle by the mid-twentieth century, they had lost their visibility and became American. O'Grady asserted that the increasing affluence and influence of Irish Americans, combined with the liberation of Ireland, constituted the catalyst for their Americanization. They no longer had to worry about the oppression of their counterparts back home, and the Irish who immigrated to the United States reaped the economic benefits of the booming economy of the 1920s, so the need to be radical nationalists had suddenly dissipated.<sup>4</sup>

Kerby A. Miller emphasized class in the process of Irish Americanization. According to Miller, historians had traditionally viewed Irish-American identity through either an assimilationist or ethnic resilience paradigm. Miller took a third approach proffered by labor historians, which contested that social and cultural distinctions were blurred by an ethnically distinct working-class subculture. Irish-American ethnic identity was building at the same time a transatlantic capitalism was developing. Since the Irish brought with them an anti-individualistic and pre-capitalist, communal worldview, they clashed with the changing tide of American capitalism. As a result, Irish-American labor unions, for example, were branded as un-American. In the end, Irish-American ethnicity

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<sup>4</sup> Shannon, *The American Irish*, 1963; Joseph P. O'Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans* (New York City: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 38, 138.

was the product of both Irish antagonism toward England and a particularly American aversion to the notion of wage slavery.<sup>5</sup>

David A. Gerber reasoned that ethnicization actually served to create social pluralism, and he used antebellum Buffalo as his case study. The Irish became Irish before the Civil War, when the conjunction of historical Irish oppression in Europe, severe poverty, and nativist hostility provided the impetus for the ethnicization of the Irish. Gerber used the Irish in Buffalo to challenge the notion that the dominant American culture unilaterally dictated the Americanization of its immigrants. Following the American Revolution, American national identity was purely ideological in nature, in order to differentiate Americans from their former British overlords. Anyone, including the Irish, blended in if they accepted the vague principles of American liberty and republicanism. Along these lines, Dale T. Knobel asserted that it was the 1850s before the Irish actually became the Irish in the United States. Ethnicity had yet to be tied to virtue and thus, the Irish were permitted to participate in the American experiment. When the Famine Irish poured into America in droves, native Americans tied their rather roughshod physical appearance to their ethnicity and created a new race of Irishmen disqualified from inclusion in the American Republic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kerby A. Miller, "Class, Culture, and Immigrant Group Identity in the United States: The Case of Irish-American Ethnicity" in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1990), 97-98, 107-109, 124.

<sup>6</sup> David A. Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York, 1825-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 162; Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 50-51, 88, 100. While Knobel's arguments are convincing regarding the Irish in the United States, Irish histories have demonstrated that this process had long been underway in Britain – see L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997) and Michael De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

Many Americans, alarmed by their massive influx and strange behaviors, invented ethnicity and pronounced the nature/nurture debate settled in favor of the former. The Irish refuted this by promulgating a literal interpretation of American republicanism and arguing that the U.S. was held together solely by political bonds. Meanwhile, they embraced whiteness as a means of using ethnicity to define themselves against something they were not. In inventing traditions like St. Patrick's Day and grouping together Irish and American heroes, the Irish proffered a public self-perception that they used to legitimize themselves in the new country. Many historians have attested that ethnic designations were merely window dressing for economic exploitation. According to many historians, class was an ethnic trait in America. Since immigrants entered the country with so little, they started out on the bottom rung of the American socioeconomic ladder. As they climbed the ladder, ethnicity disappeared and gave way to a working-class consciousness. The process had run its course by the era of the First World War, when most foreigners left ethnic enclaves for working-class neighborhoods. In essence, industrialization homogenized American ethnic groups, signifying the change from an ethnic to a class-identified country.<sup>7</sup>

Jon Gjerde contended that allegiance to their ethnic subgroup actually hastened the Americanization of immigrants. While they held on to cultural traits from their past, immigrants often glorified the American political system and way of life. They fabricated ways in which they were superior to Europeans and espoused American Exceptionalism, which sped up the process of assimilation. Since immigrants tended to

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<sup>7</sup> David A. Gerber and Kathleen Neils Conzen, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1(Fall 1992): 3-42; Olivier Zunz, John Bodnar, and Stephan Thernstrom, "American History and the Changing Meaning of Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Spring 1985): 53-72.

hold on to their past cultures, pluralism was actually deeply embedded in American national loyalty. Christian G. Samito suggested that the American Irish purchased their American citizenship through their sacrifices on behalf of the Union during the American Civil War. The Irish emphasized their wartime experiences in pushing for full American citizenship, with their military service allowing them to argue that their loyalty trumped their ethnicity in claiming Americanism.<sup>8</sup>

This study contends that that these models are insufficient for understanding the manner in which the American Irish articulated what it meant to be an American. Irish-American leaders always maintained that the Irish, from their initial arrival in the United States (or the American colonies prior to 1776), were full Americans. Assimilation and Americanization were moot points for a people who viewed the idea of America as they did. The American Irish never sought to conform or assimilate to anything; in their view, others should be conforming and assimilating to them, on account of their purer brand of Americanism. Early in their American tenure, the uncertain Irish used the words of highly-touted Americans to demonstrate how they were fully American. This evolved as they became more firmly entrenched as American citizens. After several decades in the United States, their American nationalism had incorporated a collection of invented American traditions that placed the Irish above all others in the pantheon of great Americans.

This study takes a snapshot of Irish Americans and their national identities at two critical junctures in the history of both their ancestral and their adopted countries. The

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<sup>8</sup> Jon Gjerde, "The Burden of their Song: Immigrant Encounters with the Republic" in *American Dreaming, Global Realities*, ed. by Donna R. Gabaccia and Vicki Ruiz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 11-17; Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 4-7.

Civil War era and First World War era provide ideal time frames for such an evaluation. Ireland was still reeling from the Great Famine during the 1850s and 1860s, and the United States was a house divided. The Civil War tested their resolve as new residents of the United States; the Irish hated Lincoln and the Republican Party but had to walk a thin patriotic line so as not to appear disloyal during the war. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, political upheaval in Ireland presented an enormous dilemma for Irish-Americans: the Irish were fighting for independence from Great Britain, a country the United States supported unofficially during the first years of the Great War, officially joining as an ally in 1917. Again, their loyalty and patriotism were on trial. While the Irish went through the motions of supporting Wilson's war effort after American entry, they touted their *catholic* (note the lower-case c) brand of Americanism in framing their opposition to the president's peace treaty. By analyzing the manner in which Irish Americans articulated their views on their Americanism and how it compared to that of other Americans tells us a great deal about the debate over what it meant to be an American during these two politically and patriotically and politically-charged eras.

Analyzing these two particular eras will extract how Irish Americans felt about the country and their relationship to it under the stresses of wartime. War excites great passions. It constitutes a national existential crisis, as countless lives of military personnel (and civilians) are at stake. Patriotism often gets equated with blind adherence to the government's chosen course of action; anyone questioning the war effort can be charged with undermining the safety of the country and its citizens. As a result, it is difficult for anyone to oppose American wars, especially when they are considered to be a "foreign" to begin with. How the American Irish did so gives great insight into how

they viewed America and how they sought to reconcile these seemingly conflicting ideals.

Much of the existing literature has focused on how the Irish assimilated into the dominant American culture (or became “American”). These histories have focused on the *process* by which the Irish transitioned from being outsiders to mainstream Americans. As a result, this project is not a typical study of the Irish during the Civil War or the First World War. It does not follow this traditional paradigm. It does not center on the Irish Brigade, the fighting motivations of the Irish during the Civil War, or Irish-American attempts to conspire with the Germans during the First World War (although these subjects are touched on in this narrative). Rather it looks at how the Irish viewed the United States, other citizens, and themselves as Americans during two separate American wars that divided their loyalties and forced them to confront their competing patriotisms and national identities. In doing so, this study will more fully determine how the concepts of American history, loyalty, patriotism, nationalism, and citizenry developed between 1860 and 1925, ultimately helping understand how Irish leaders sought to use the concept of “America” itself to further their own ambitions.

This dissertation argues that Irish leaders promoted a particular brand of Americanism to the Irish-American masses that sought the best possible outcomes for the Irish people on both sides of the Atlantic. They presented a two-pronged Irish-American nationalism. There was a civic component, whereby the Irish held that anyone could be an American based on their approval of the principles outlined in the country’s founding documents. There was, however, also an ethnic component to it, whereby the Irish in America claimed that they were inherently the most American of any people in the

country (or world). They linked their politics, religion, and culture to the principles of the Founders, and they loudly highlighted any and all Irish contributions to American history. In doing so, they forged an Irish-American collective memory by cherry-picking American history. They molded this memory to the situation in which they found themselves and increasingly blurred the lines between Irish and American. By the First World War era, Irish leaders had launched a full-blown war over the memory of the American Revolution because to these Irish-American leaders, the liberation of Ireland depended on their version of it firmly entrenching itself in the American public's mind. This distinctly Irish-American interpretation of U.S. history was critical. It was a self-conscious use of American history tailored in each era to the particular needs of the Irish community. During the Civil War, they used their interpretation and memory of the American Revolution to insulate themselves from nativist attacks on their American loyalty. During and right after the First World War, Irish Americans used this interpretation and memory of American history to make their case for Irish freedom while again shielding themselves from accusations of divided loyalties.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the Irish-American masses necessarily ascribed to or were even cognizant of many of these ideas. After all, Irish Americans were scattered across the country and concerned with their own daily trials and tribulations (particularly those in lower classes). Most of them did not join organizations, read Irish-American newspapers, or subscribe to Irish causes – see D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1801-1921* (W. Tempest: Dundalgan Press, 1984), 36. A good example of this is the Irish longshoremen of Portland, Maine. Attempts to organize them into Irish nationalist societies were only marginally successful, as they were primarily concerned with their own economic affairs. The more Americanized they became, however, the more committed to Irish nationalism they could become – see Michael C. Connolly, “Nationalism among early Twentieth-Century Irish Longshoremen in Portland, Maine,” in *They Change their Sky: The Irish in Maine*, ed. Michael C. Connolly (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2004), 291-292. The San Francisco Irish were generally accepted much quicker than were their brethren in places like the American northeast. The city elected an Irish mayor back in 1867 (Frank McCoppin) and Senator David Broderick (elected in 1857) also had Irish ancestry. These early political successes ran counter to the Northeastern experience – see R.A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848-1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 7. The San Francisco Irish found group identity with a positive (as opposed to defensive) attachment to the Catholic Church, and they experienced little in the way of nativism and discrimination. It was an easy transition to full acceptance as Americans, so there was no need to seek respectability in a free Ireland – see Timothy Sarbaugh, “Exiles of Confidence: The Irish-American Community of San Francisco, 1880-1920” in *From Paddy to Studs: Irish-American Communities in the*

The First World War era continued past the cessation of hostilities in Europe. American entry into the League of Nations and the subsequent turmoil over the level of autonomy ceded to Ireland were extensions of the same issues that many Irish-American nationalists had discussed during the war itself. As such, this study will analyze the entire period from 1914-1923 as the First World War era. Throughout that decade, salient Irish Americans used their Americanism to work on behalf of Ireland. Many radical nationalists employed the enemy of their enemy and consciously promoted the German cause prior to American entry. After that, these Irish-American nationalists tentatively paid lip service to the American cause but promised to hold Wilson to his stated war aims (making the world safe for democracy) as they related to Ireland. After the First World War, Ireland's future became the primary issue. The Irish objected to Wilson's League of Nations and called it un-American because it sanctioned the status quo in Ireland. It qualified Ireland as a British possession, thus rendering any Irish rebellion an attack on a member state. This would conceivably force the United States to fight against Irish freedom. The Irish used American Revolutionary rhetoric to qualify Irish opposition, and they compared the situation in Ireland in 1920 with the American

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*Turn of the Century Era*, ed. Timothy J. Meagher (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 161-174. Meagher has focused much of his research on Irish-American communities and how the notion of a monolithic "Irish America" was a false paradigm from which to study of Irish-American history. This collection of essays reinforces his assertions. Martin G. Towey argued that the Irish in St. Louis intermingled quickly with all other Americans and were accepted rather than persecuted for their Catholicism – see Martin G. Towey, "Kerry Patch Revisited: Irish Americans in St. Louis in the turn of the Century Era" in *From Paddy to Studs*, 139-140, 157. Meagher expanded on this hypothesis in his work on the Irish in Worcester, Massachusetts. "There was no typical Irish American experience," claimed Meagher, pointing out that the Irish in Worcester encountered a much different set of circumstances than did Irish in all other cities. In Worcester, a militant brand of Catholic Americanism developed (amongst other machinations of ethnic identity) to combat the entrenched Yankee Protestant corporate economic stronghold. In Butte, on the other hand, David Emmons showed that the owners of the copper mines (where the vast majority of the Irish there worked) were Irish themselves, so Irish-American nationalism bound employer and employee – see Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1920* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 16.

colonies in 1776. They applied the same principles to Ireland and pleaded that their interpretation and memory of American history was under attack from a vague pro-British conspiracy. This was especially relevant after the Irish Free State was established and severed in two in December 1921. This scheme was manifested in a pro-British press but especially in school textbooks. The Irish attacked these textbooks as un-American because of the perceived and imagined sleights to the integrity of the notable American patriots, as well as for omissions of Irish participation. Irish-American leaders frequently commented on the importance of preserving and promoting their version of U.S. history. Ireland depended on the United States staying true to these Revolutionary ideals, and Americans owed Ireland freedom.

Unless otherwise noted, the terms Irish, Irish Americans, and American Irish are used interchangeably. All these terms, including “the Irish,” refer to the primary subjects of this dissertation: prominent Irish Americans. The text will denote when referring to people actually living in Ireland. Many of these prominent Irish during the First World Era frequently shuttled across the Atlantic, however. They are grouped together with the prominent Irish Americans here, as these men worked together as propagandists seeking to influence the Irish-American (and mainstream American) public opinion. During the Civil War, unless otherwise denoted, it refers to Irish living in the North. In addition, the Irish discussed herein are overwhelmingly Irish Catholics, although their ranks certainly included some Protestants. Especially by the First World War era, Irish Catholic nationalists dismissed the Scotch-Irish as un-Irish (and thus, un-American) British stooges bent on fracturing Ireland. This, of course, reflected the debate over the Irish Home Rule, the Irish Free State, and especially the Irish Republic. The outspoken Irish-

American nationalists demanded full autonomy with no partition of Ireland. They still, however, claimed certain American heroes of Scotch-Irish ancestry and passed them off as “Irish.” Additionally, in analyzing these Irish-American identities, I will often refer to “America” not as a country or a land mass but rather as an Irish social and political construction. “America” constituted everything for which these Irish leaders claimed to stand. “America” meant freedom and opportunity for everyone everywhere – it was not synonymous with “The United States.” In some instances, however, the terms “America” and the “United States” are used interchangeably to avoid repetition. Context should denote when this is the case.

For the sake of fluidity and avoiding superfluous wordiness, this dissertation will often refer to the *Irish* or *Irish Americans*, when *Irish leaders* or *prominent Irish-American citizens* would be a more precise qualification of those to whom I am discussing (and in a few cases, Irish/Irish-American leaders). This study does not claim or intend to take the pulse of the everyday Irish immigrant. Rather, it analyzes how (and cedes agency to) those in positions of power within the Irish-American community (newspaper editors, nationalistic club members, historians, letter writers, lawyers, speakers, and other well-known citizens of Irish descent who spoke about these issues and had a large forum with which to do so, as well as those from the emerald isle who collaborated with these Irish-American leaders), sought to mold both Irish-American and mainstream American opinions of the Irish as a whole. The typical Irish immigrant left behind few written materials, especially in the Civil War era, and the topic of this dissertation is better suited by analyzing the sources that were being widely disseminated. This dissertation analyzes how Irish-American leaders (and their Irish cohorts, in the First

World War era) propagandized Irish Americanization. At some level, it is a study of how Irish nationalists attempted to sway the opinions of other Irish Americans. How successful these nationalists were in getting Irish-American commoners to adopt their message is the subject for another study. At any rate, this study utilizes a preponderance of newspaper sources, particularly for the Civil War era. Not every word published in these newspapers was authored by someone of Irish descent, but the decision to print the words and the target audience were overwhelmingly Irish. By the First World War era, an assortment of Irish-American nationalistic societies joined with the Irish-American press in promulgating a discernable brand of Irish-American patriotism and political identity.<sup>10</sup>

As is often the case with these sources (newspapers, speeches, and records of various nationalistic societies), they contain significant biases. And that, of course, has its own set of limitations. Yet that is why these sources are especially well-suited to this study. This is a study of the attempt to mold American public opinion, among both Irish and non-Irish, to recognize and support a specific brand of Americanism. It was an

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<sup>10</sup> The Civil War press was the most important source of information for Americans in both sections of the country during the Civil War. They reported events but also played a crucial role in molding public opinion, as they often sought to popularize their own political agendas. These editors held enormous agency, as they shaped and even swayed public perceptions of the war throughout its prosecution. Editors portrayed men like Lincoln in unflattering or deferential fashion, depending on their point of view. And many others printed blatantly fabricated stories in order to project a particular political program on its readership. While many major works on the Civil War press have ignored the Irish-American press, it behaved in much the same manner, manipulating and propagandizing events to fit their particular agenda. Surprisingly, the Civil War press has received less treatment than one might expect. A wave of recent scholarship has partially corrected that, however. An older book focusing on the war reporters is Emmet Crozier, *The War Correspondents, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), whereas a more recent volume is Ian F. Beckett, *The War Correspondents: The American Civil War* (Dover: Alan Sutton, 1993). For a valuable volume that analyzes how editors attempted to influence opinion, chalked full of anecdotes, see Brayton Harris, *Blue and Gray in Black and White* (Washington: Brassey's, 1999). Many papers even printed completely fictitious accounts to influence public opinion; this was referred to as reptile journalism. For a discussion of Charles A. Dunham, the most notorious reptile journalist, see Carman Cumming, *Devil's Game: The Civil War Intrigues of Charles A. Dunham* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). For an excellent book analyzing how Lincoln was depicted in Civil War newspapers for propaganda purposes, see Gary L. Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon: Lincoln's Image in Illustrated Periodicals, 1860-1865* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001).

attempt to use the construction of “America” to best fit the Irish cause, against the backdrop of war and national crisis. These papers often cite dubious evidence or none at all, and they frequently make hyperbolic or preposterous claims. These wild accusations and grossly-exaggerated claims must be interpreted in their proper context; this was propaganda broadcasted as a means of achieving a particular end. While many of these claims are taken out of context, exaggerated, or even patently false, therefore, they are used to tell the story of how the Irish viewed their American identity in these two tumultuous eras. Unless otherwise denoted, any emphases (italics or brackets) found within quotations were found in the original sources, and errors in these sources have also been preserved from primary sources.

In a project such as this, one finds oneself often engaging scholarship from a wide array of fields not always in direct conversation with one another. To properly situate the study within the broader context of the field, it is necessary to develop an intellectual palaver of sorts by delving into the literature on acculturation, assimilation, pluralism, nationalism, patriotism, loyalty, citizenship, race, and how the Irish case fits into these debates. The study of “assimilation” or “Americanization” has outgrown these somewhat dated terms themselves. The twentieth-century study of immigrant assimilation in the United States began, however, with what historians have deemed the Anglo-conformity model. Within the confines of this framework, immigrants become American by conforming to a homogenous, WASP-created and dominated American culture. The study of immigrant assimilation, however, ascribed to these ideas through the Anglo-conformity model and next through the Melting Pot model of immigrant assimilation. In the first half of the twentieth century, this “American” culture was a strictly Anglo-Saxon

American culture, which immigrants quickly accepted, losing their ethnic and cultural baggage. It assumed both the existence and desirability of a quick and seamless transition into the mainstream Anglo-Saxon American culture. Later, this Anglo-conformist paradigm evolved into the American Melting Pot archetype for immigrant assimilation, which still assumed the inevitability and allure of American newcomers conforming to a WASP-dominated abstract American culture. Under this prototype, immigrants still blended into a homogeneous American culture after their arrival to the United States. Unlike the Anglo-conformist model, the Melting Pot did at least take into account the cultural contributions of the immigrants themselves. The Melting Pot paradigm eventually gave way to an American pluralism framework, whereby groups of immigrants assimilated to the dominant American culture. All the while, these groups contributed to this composite American culture and retaining some semblance of subgroup cultural identity that distinguished them from the American people at large.<sup>11</sup>

### **Irish Assimilation and Americanization**

According to Hans Kohn, many turn-of-the-century American nativists made the American Melting Pot a key cog in their construction of American nationalism. The idea actually encouraged conformity during the First World War era, as the idea of a homogenous Anglo-Saxon America gained prominence. Richard Conant Harper explained that the Anglo-Americanization (Anglo-conformity) model was especially popular in the eras of the 1890s and the 1920s, which were marked by restriction. Immigrants were either eligible or ineligible for membership in America due to racial or

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<sup>11</sup> Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," in *American Historical Review* (April 1995): 437-442.

ethnic traits inherent to them. The inclusive cultural pluralism model still drew hard ethnic and racial lines though it celebrated American nationality as “a harmonious cooperation of the cultural and ethnic groupings from around the world.” Harper remained partial to the Melting Pot model of assimilation though. He stated that there were two melting pots, one cultural and another biological, which produced the American. In Harper’s view, Americans also linked their political values inherent in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence to embrace anyone willing to accept those doctrines. Thus the Melting Pot paradigm offered up the only framework that encompassed all four identifying markers of what it meant to be an American: citizenship as a choice rather than accident of birth, diverse mixture of American blood, individualism and equality inherent in the country’s political heritage, and cultural diversity producing an American cultural symmetry.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars like Oscar Handlin highlighted the first generation of American historians who subscribed to the Melting Pot model. In Handlin’s view, Americanization had three main components. Immigrants needed an ethnic group identity, individualism, and acceptance from old-stock Americans. The first two were much easier achieved than the third, as immigrants expressed their individualism merely by traveling to America. As Herbert J. Gans pointed out, economic and cultural assimilation begin immediately upon arrival, but social assimilation takes more time. For social assimilation to fully materialize, acceptance from the native-born American majority would be necessary. Handlin noted that immigrants suffered a tremendous deal of alienation as a result of immigrating to the United States. The slums, poverty, and exploitation they found upon

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<sup>12</sup> Phillip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 4, 17; Richard Conant Harper, *The Course of the Melting Pot Idea to 1910* (New York City: Arno Press, 1980), 11-12, 26-29.

arrival hindered their assimilation and gave rise to new nationalistic organizations designed to alleviate their wounded pride. Handlin looked at the specific case of the Irish in Boston, where he indicated that financial limitations necessitated that the droves of Irish arriving in the city prior to 1864 forced them to stay put. The large numbers of unskilled Irish actually helped turn Boston into a manufacturing city.<sup>13</sup>

As Russell A. Kazal pointed out in 1995, terms like assimilation and Americanization have an “archaic ring” in the modern American age of multiculturalism. No longer do scholars subscribe to the existence of a monolithic “American” culture that immigrants eventually unilaterally conform to by shedding all of their Old World identities in favor of an “American” culture, set against a non-American, or un-American, culture. Milton M. Gordon asserted that the disjointed nature of American society allowed for ethnic subgroups to thrive while still linked to the overall social nature. He declared that the Anglo-conformity model had succeeded only in acculturation, the use of the English language, and the embrace of American democratic ideals. Claiming that the Melting Pot theory was little more than an American pipe dream, he stressed that America was a multiple-melting pot. Ethnic groups retained much of their cultural heritage while integrating both politically and economically into the American mainstream.<sup>14</sup>

Ewa Morawska predicated her thesis on the notion that the assimilationist model that Milton Gordon had perfected in the early 1960s had fallen into disrepute. This

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<sup>13</sup> Herbert J. Gans, “The American Kaleidoscope: Then and Now” in *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and what it means to be an American*, ed. Tamar Jacoby (New York City: Perseus Books, 2004), 33-34; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1951); Oscar Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Belknap at Harvard Press, 1959), 62, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation,” 437-440; Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1964), 130-131, 262-263.

model had been replaced by ethnicization models and socially-constructed ethnic phenomena models not because of inherent faults but because it was too simplistic. The assimilationist model had been modeled much too closely on the Anglo-conformity model of the early twentieth century. Instead there were three stages of immigrant assimilation, which included intermarriage with the dominant group followed by the disappearance of a collective ethnic identity and finally the renunciation of ethnic identification. According to Wendy F. Katkin and Ned Landsman, the Melting Pot idea died in part because many Americans rejected its simplistic view of social relations and assimilation. The model assumed that anyone who valued co-existence with others was un-American and that a standard blanket Americanism was the preferred culture of anyone who entered the country. Pluralism did not exist nor was it attractive within the confines of the Melting Pot paradigm.<sup>15</sup>

A later generation of scholars espoused the doctrine that ethnicity itself was merely a tool for controlling the growing Euro-American working class. The dominant interpretation through time had been that assimilation was quick and easy, and both the Anglo-conformity and melting pot models fit that framework. Scholar Werner Sollors professed that the key to understanding ethnicity was to study the works on nations and nationalism by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson. Just as those great scholars had avouched that nations were political constructions, Sollors argued that ethnicity was also a socially-constructed device. Those at the top of the American socioeconomic ladder thus used ethnicity to keep working-class European immigrants in their place. With

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<sup>15</sup> Ewa Morawska, "In Defense of the Assimilation Model," in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1994), 76-86; Wendy F. Katkin and Ned Landsman, "Introduction: The Construction of American Pluralism," in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, ed. Wendy Katkin et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1-3.

Werner Sollors, David A. Gerber and Kathleen Neils Conzen alleged that ethnicity was invented, constructed to fit the particular challenges of various (often competing) groups in American society. By the early 1990s, historians of the cultural pluralism viewpoint had begun to proffer the idea that immigrants evolved into “ethnic Americans” in the United States, but Gerber and Conzen rejected this line of thinking on the basis that it assumed (with scholars like Clifford Geertz and Harold Isaacs) that ethnicity was a primordial trait instead of a social construction. Gerber and Conzen ceded a great deal of agency to the immigrants themselves as well, arguing that they re-invented their own ethnicity to fit the various circumstances in which they found themselves and to combat the challenges they faced. Often they defined themselves against the dominant culture to achieve these ends in this “continual renegotiation of identities.”<sup>16</sup>

Una Ni Bhroimeil affirmed that the American Irish helped forge an identity based on ethnic pride in which they fostered a sensibility around cultural factors such as the revival of Gaelic between the two wars analyzed in this study. According to Bhroimeil, Kerby Miller and David Emmons denoted that Irish Americans contributed to Irish independence because of a certain responsibility they felt. Thomas N. Brown argued it was an inferiority complex developed out of the degradation in American society, while William V. Shannon saw the movement as one of assimilation. The American Irish looked to remake Ireland in America’s image in order to confer dignity on their heritage and by proxy, themselves. Bhroimeil applied the language revival movement of the latter nineteenth century and uses this as an extension of Shannon’s thesis, arguing that the American Irish celebrated their culture, even though it hindered their immediate

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<sup>16</sup> Werner Sollors, “Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1989), xi; Gerber and Conzen, “The Invention of Ethnicity,” 3-42.

prospects of Americanization. In doing so, Irish Americans simultaneously celebrated their heritage and fought for the independence of their ancestral homelands, thus instilling national pride in America. Political considerations such as the Home Rule movement and First World War largely phased out the movement. The Gaelic revival movement in the United States was largely for entertainment purposes, as establishing Gaelic as a legitimate language was never a goal. It was always a matter of pride, but the immediacy and intensity of the movement were lost on Irish Americans.<sup>17</sup>

An imagined national community is necessary for nationalism and national identity to garner widespread appeal. Scholars have identified the importance of national customs and treasures to create this imagined community. Eric Hobsbawm emphasized the existence of invented traditions in the formulation of national identity and nationalism. He cited statues of American leaders, the pilgrim ships, and the nostalgic American memory of classical golden ages like 1776, 1865, and even 1944-45 as typical American traditions. Ernest Renan actually defined patriotism as shared recollection of (happy) history and symbolic figures (and a shared amnesia of less prideful moments in history). The American Irish certainly invented their own American traditions in formulating their brand of American patriotism, at least by the First World War era. Chief amongst these traditions was their romantic version of Irish-American history,

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<sup>17</sup> Una Ni Bhroimeil, *Building Irish Identity in America, 1870-1915* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 23-31, 133-134; See also Kenneth E. Nilsen, "The Irish Language in New York, 1850-1900," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Timothy J. Meagher and Ronald H. Bayor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 252-274. For a discussion of the Gaelic League in Ireland, its leaders and their profound influences on the formation of modern Irish national identity, see Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893-1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

which of course, rendered them authorities on all matters concerning the meaning of America.<sup>18</sup>

This version of American history deeply influenced the formation of Irish-American nationalism. It heavily colored the civic component of that nationalism, which became an ethnic/civic hybrid. Liah Greenfeld pointed out that ethnic nationalism holds greater appeal than does civic egalitarian nationalism since part of the appeal of nationalism is dominance over others. Thus, nationalism is inherently attractive to those predisposed to ethnic superiority. Irish leaders espoused the rhetoric of civic American nationalism but also claimed that the Irish were particularly suited to the rigors of American republicanism and were more American than other ethnic, racial, or religious groups. The American Irish always claimed that they were especially American. They based that claim on their patriotism, nationalism, loyalty, politics, religion, culture, customs, and history. This collective national identity paralleled the general arc of American history.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Irish and the Concept of Whiteness**

Issues regarding race are especially germane to this study as the Irish used them to make headway towards full American membership. This concept is crucial because scholars have attempted to show how the Irish intended to ingratiate themselves to the American public at large. This dissertation will show that Irish leaders wanted others to

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<sup>18</sup> Patrice Higonnet, *Attendant Cruelties: Nation and Nationalism in American History* (New York City: Other Press, 2007,) xiii-xiv; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> John Bodnar, ed., *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

respect their contributions. If anyone needed to conform, in their view, it was not the Irish. Race and its relation to the construction of ethnicity has become the major focus of the historiography regarding assimilation in the past two decades, and the case of the Irish has been no exception. Many scholars in the past twenty years have implicated the Irish in consciously seeking the social and economic privileges afforded to white Americans after their arrival. Labeled a foreign race in the United States, they set out to improve their social position and quickly learned that their light skin color could help in this regard.

Using social constructions of race to control poor American workers of European descent was a distinctly American idea. According to some scholars, the Irish quickly adopted this form of constructing identity. Used as a way of distinguishing oneself from “others,” whiteness emerged in antebellum America as fears of dependency on wage labor materialized. According to David Roediger, there had been much less racialized terminology in the workforce prior to the American Revolution. After the birth of the United States, however, the vernacular shifted. Masters became bosses, servants became hired people, and hirelings became slaves. Whereas during the late colonial period there had been no racial demarcations for indentured servitude, apprenticeships, or farm tenancy, the terms “white slavery” or “wage slavery” were thrown around loosely during the antebellum era. The care taken by white workers to assure themselves of whiteness thus actually helped create the slaveholding republic. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, racial eligibility for full American citizenship was legally nebulous between 1840 and 1920. After all, the Constitution guaranteed citizenship to free white immigrants, but much debate existed over exactly who qualified as white. Between 1890

and 1924, Anglo-Saxons claimed an exclusive hold on whiteness, and a white/non-white dichotomy emerged. A great deal of regional variation also existed. For example, an Irish American in Boston in the 1870s was considered a non-white “Celt,” but the same man in San Francisco would have been considered white. Jacobsen explicated that the Irish became American in part due to identifying with the highly racialized imperialism of the turn of the century era. European immigrants like the Irish celebrated the dawn of American empire and therein became American. They celebrated the contributions of the Irish “race” to the war efforts, and in doing so, used their whiteness to identify with the highly nationalistic American patriotism sweeping the country. The Irish and other white immigrants thus used American imperialism to include themselves in the imagined community of Americans.<sup>20</sup>

Noel Ignatiev reasoned that the American Irish became Americans by becoming racial oppressors. When they arrived in America, they were an oppressed race of foreigners, but by pragmatically pursuing whiteness, they Americanized and became part of the dominant and oppressive white race in the United States. They were the blacks of Europe, and they quickly recognized upon their arrival in the United States that American blacks were on the bottom and for their own purposes, they should stay “in their place.” Lauren Onkey took issue with Ignatiev’s landmark study, pointing out that he argued that the Irish learned how to be white and thus to be racists only after their journey to the United States. Previously, they had no access to the privileges of whiteness. After

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<sup>20</sup> See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5, 13-14; Matthew Frye Jacobsen, “Malevolent Assimilation: Immigrants and the Question of American Empire” in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, ed. Wendy Katkin et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 154-156.

surveying the socioeconomic landscape in America, however, they embraced whiteness as the key to American privilege and prosperity. They subjected all other individualities (and points of animus with the dominant Anglo-Saxon majority) to the bond they had with those who had the same skin color. The Irish thus checked their national, ethnic, and religious identity at the American shore. The Irish spurned the idea of joining blacks to form a class-conscious American proletariat and instead helped proliferate American white supremacy through their subsequent actions. Ignatiev emphatically claimed that the Irish had a choice in this matter, thus complicating the historiographical issue of Irish Americans as an oppressed group.<sup>21</sup>

As Onkey indicated, Ignatiev's controversial ideas met with some skepticism and criticism. Graham Hodges found close mid-nineteenth century interactions between Irish and blacks in New York City's Sixth Ward, and Onkey herself used plays by the Irish-American Ned Harrigan to demonstrate how closely the black and Irish characters interacted with each other. In a review, Diane Nerra contended that Ignatiev had given too much agency to the Irish themselves in this process. Irish self-determination could only get them so far; they needed help from others to truly become white. Paul Spickard constructed a model of assimilation based on ethnocentric and racial discrimination against foreigners in the United States. He contested the notion that the Irish were ever

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<sup>21</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-2, 178-179; Lauren Onkey, "'A Melee and a Curtain': Black-Irish Relations in Ned Harrigan's *The Mulligan Guard Ball*," *Jouvert* 4 (1994). In his analysis of close marital and labor relations between Irish and African Americans in New York as late as the 1860s, Graham Hodges contended that historians have overstated this Irish racial antipathy toward blacks – see Graham Hodges, "Desirable Companions and Lovers: Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward, 1830-1870," in Timothy J. Meagher and Ronald H. Bayor (eds.), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 107-124. Brian Kelly took issue with Ignatiev's assertion that Irish economic antipathy was merely window dressing for racism. In Kelly's view, the Irish thought they were poor *because* they were Irish and Catholic and as a result, had inherent obstacles to joining the abolitionists – see Brian Kelly, "Ambiguous Loyalties: The Boston Irish, Slavery, and the Civil War" in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 24(1996): 170-171; Lauren Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity: Celtic Soul Brothers* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 8-9.

anything but white in the United States. Few beast-like Irish caricatures actually existed, especially when compared to other non-white races. Thus, while the Irish certainly faced discrimination and bigotry in the United States, the road to Americanization for non-white immigrants was far longer and bumpier.<sup>22</sup>

Catherine M. Egan evinced the idea that whites actively lobbied for white status in America, drawing on Irish-American novels from the nineteenth century as evidence of this clamoring for whiteness. By the middle of the nineteenth century, American nativists claimed that political, cultural, national, and religious differences rendered the Irish racially inferior to the Anglo-Saxon majority. Their Catholicism and Irish nationalism rendered them unfit for status as full Americans. Since these traits were racial in nature, it would be difficult to make them disappear. As a result, the Irish set out to be white. In Irish-American novels, the protagonists and most proper characters spoke good English, were always white, and were indistinguishable from Protestant characters. The Irish were claiming whiteness but at the same time, many of the novels did also emphasize the differences between themselves and the Anglo-Saxon race. Egan's argument was thus that while the Irish used their novels to claim whiteness, they still recognized and even promoted the idea that they were racially distinct from mainstream American Anglo-Saxons.<sup>23</sup>

Matthew Pratt Guterl declared that Irish-American nationalists, in hoping to galvanize support for a free Ireland, asserted that they were of a different white race by the First World War era. They came to see themselves as a race distinct from the Anglo-

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<sup>22</sup> Lauren Onkey, "A Melee and a Curtain"; Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York City: Routledge Press, 2007), 124-125.

<sup>23</sup> Catherine M. Egan, "'White,' if 'Not Quite': Irish Whiteness in the Nineteenth-Century Irish-American Novel" in *New Directions in Irish-American History*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 140-142.

Saxons, and they openly celebrated their “Irishness,” culminating with the 1916 Irish Race Convention. The Great War presented several problems for these nationalists, however. Whereas the Irish had embraced whiteness earlier, they now sought to distinguish themselves from Anglo-Saxons. Against the backdrop of a highly-racialized debate over American acceptance, these Irish-American nationalists had to convince the British and American leaders and citizens that not only were there masses of Irish who embraced these notions of Irishness but that they opposed the Allied war effort. They also needed to raise funds to support an Irish rebellion, all the while protecting themselves from nativist attacks in an era in which super-patriotism labeled any celebration of cultural pluralism as unpatriotic hyphenism. In order to reconcile Irishness with the super-patriotism of the day, Irish-American nationalists celebrated this concept of cultural pluralism. By doing so, groups could fully Americanize while still celebrating cultural characteristics that would distinguish them from other Americans. Irish-American leaders thus celebrated the national characteristics of assorted European ethnic minorities, thus marginalizing whiteness and celebrating cultural pluralism as a distinctly American trait. Irish leaders attempted to rewrite American history by emphasizing their reputation as brawlers and fighters and exaggerating their American military contributions.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 81. Guterl argues that Irish-American nationalism entailed a romanticized view of the peoples of the world, in which there were dozens of races distinguishable by a variety of characteristics over and above color. Whereas Wilson and others viewed whiteness as a race, the Irish saw Irishness as a race and sought to distinguish themselves racially from Anglo-Saxons. This “new race consciousness” was a crucial component of their nationalism – see Matthew Pratt Guterl, “The New Race Consciousness: Race, Nation, and Empire in American Culture, 1910-1925,” *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2(1999): 307-352. In his book, Guterl mentions an assortment of Irish-American claims in one paragraph on this subject, notably the following: that George Washington was sympathetic to the Irish cause, that Irish sailed with Columbus, that Ireland was the cradle of ancient civilization, and that scientific evidence proved the overwhelming prominence of Irish in the American Revolution. This study will argue that this is a much more pertinent

This study alleges that while the Irish may indeed have embraced whiteness as an avenue out of the socioeconomic doldrums in the United States, they certainly did not publicize that. Although plenty of evidence exists to brand the Irish as racists during both of these eras, their claims to Americanism reference white supremacy only indirectly. The Irish of the First World War era omitted it almost entirely; by this time, they distinguished between the Irish race and the Anglo-Saxon race. The Irish consistently emphasized an inclusive Americanism blind to racial distinctions (although the Civil War Irish excluded those of African descent from being Americans). The nature of Irish racism (and whether or not it was economically-motivated or window dressing for economic concerns) is not explicitly a subject of this study, but at least outwardly, the Irish did not directly associate whiteness with Americanism in either era.

### **American Patriotism**

There is nothing particularly American about the principles and ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence. The treatise pronounces a set of principles that could (and should) apply to everyone everywhere, and Thomas Jefferson expected that eventually, it would spread to all corners of the globe. Hence, American patriotism is not parochial but rather universal in nature. As a result, indifference to the plights of the oppressed everywhere is un-American and unpatriotic. The belief in the inalienable rights of all human beings (not just those living within the geographical borders of the United States of America) is what it means to be a true American.<sup>25</sup> These ideas, summed up by a prominent liberal academic in the twenty-first century, mirror quite

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point and that the Irish used this to justify their place as Americans and also attack the Americanism of others – see Guterl, *The Color of Race in America*, 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Berns, *Making Patriots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5-9.

closely the viewpoints of Irish-American leaders during the Civil War and more so during the First World War era. How they had arrived at such conclusions nearly a century (and in a less nuanced form, a century and a half) earlier demonstrates just how these leaders sought to portray the country and use it to their political ends.

American nationalism constitutes the very essence of American history itself, as the origins of the country distinguish it from all others. Americans have always been extremely proud of that and were the first people to openly tout their system of government as inherently superior to all the rest. The American Irish agreed and insisted they played a key (perhaps even *the* key) role in establishing this exceptional form of government. To insulate themselves from accusations of disloyalty during these wartime eras, the Irish used American nationalism and American history in arguing for their higher American standing. American patriotism is not a self-generating principle but rather a constructed one that was preached to the masses, often according to different doctrines.

Born during the Revolutionary period, national loyalty has been used by nativists in attempts to eradicate all foreigners. It has been used by warmongers to trump up support for American imperialism abroad and by free enterprise trying to discredit organized labor or socialists. Politicians like Woodrow Wilson used patriotism to argue that political opponents were actually disloyal by virtue of their opposition to his grand plans for the country and the world. Proponents of American patriotism often give their cause divine sanction and heavily utilize symbolism and worship of the Constitution, the flag, and American heroes to paint themselves as super American. The American Irish were especially fond of linking themselves and their ideas with those of the Founding

Fathers. American nationalism developed into a civic religion, with national heroes like Abraham Lincoln and George Washington serving as the ordained saints. Hero-worship of these men helped Americans identify with the country other than their state, which culminated in the formation of an American nation during the nineteenth century. Irish leaders used these heroes as divine sanction for their own Americanism (they used the Founding Fathers during the Civil War but expanded to include Lincoln by the First World War, conveniently forgetting how their ancestors had felt about The Great Emancipator), and they harnessed and used American nationalism to portray themselves as the most patriotic of all citizens. The American Irish employed this strategy during both wars by using the secular religion of American patriotism to give celestial authorization to their particular needs in each case.<sup>26</sup>

American patriotism fundamentally differed from classical, or “Spartan,” patriotism. In this traditional form, citizenship and patriotism were two sides of the same coin. It means love of country because it is *your* country. Due to accident of birth, *you* lived there. In its purest form, this Spartan patriotism eliminated the existence of individuality and made the state the only identity for its citizens. In the United States, however, citizenship defined the individual’s relationship to the state, but patriotism defined their morality and their values (ideals that emanated well beyond American borders). The United States was the first country to ever declare its independence based not on the past but on the future, on the idea that all were born equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights. Since anyone could become an American, these rights belonged to humanity. Only when Lincoln framed the Civil War as an ideological war

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<sup>26</sup> See Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York City: MacMillan Company, 1957); Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1946); Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation Into State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 232-235.

for all humanity (generations past, present, and future) were country and principle actually congruently aligned. The American Irish put forth this very brand of patriotism during the First World War era. It allowed them to bless their own Americanism while pushing an agenda that sought the freedom of a “foreign” nation. By claiming that all freedom-loving peoples were Americans, these Irish leaders re-defined what it meant to be an American.<sup>27</sup>

The battle over the meaning of America can be boiled down largely to the articulation of American patriotism. Woden Teachout identified two strands of patriotism, a humanitarian strand and a nationalist one. Humanitarian patriotism celebrates individual rights, equality for all before the law, and more generally, the principles inherent in the Declaration of Independence. According to Teachout, this form of patriotism was the norm in the United States until the turn of the twentieth century when it gave way to the nationalistic form of patriotism. This new exclusive brand of patriotism was based on shared cultural, social, economic, ethnic, and geographical heritage and a reverence for and deference to the state. It arose along with the new slew of prospective nation-states (and nationalisms) emerging around the globe in the early twentieth century. The American Irish consistently identified with and promoted the humanitarian form of American patriotism, although the ethnic component of their nationalism remained palpable well into the twentieth century. By doing so, it allowed them to make their American patriotism a force for Irish freedom and against Wilson’s war and League of Nations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Berns, *Making Patriots*, 4, 18, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York City: Basic Books, 2009), 5-6.

Debates surrounding American citizenship also factored into how the Irish viewed their Americanism. Yehoshua Arieli pointed out that democracy is the single unifying American factor; it is the idea upon which the country was founded more than anything else. Citizenship constituted the “formative force” of American national unity, but who qualified for full citizenship (and thus, full participation in American democracy) was another issue. Arieli argued that there were two strands of thought on the issue of American political consciousness. The first was universalistic and implied that anyone in the world who wanted to participate in this great republican experiment could do so. The second, however, embraced by nativists, implied membership in an organic national community whose values could not be transferred to just anyone. Hence, nativists rejected the notion that American citizenship was indeed a choice and sought to remake the nation in their own cultural and ethnic image. The interplay between these two ideas regarding American nationalism and citizenship determined the course of how one qualified for Americanism. Clearly, the American Irish adhered to Arieli’s more inclusive variety of American citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

Noah Pickus agreed that there were two traditions in the history of American citizenship. On one hand was the inclusive view, which preached a national identity based on the American creed of liberty and republicanism. On the other hand was the traditional interpretation, a racially exclusive ideology of American nationalism that viewed only WASPs as true Americans. Adherents of this Americanization movement thus demanded that all immigrants unabashedly conform to their notions of what America meant, while the first group that supported an inclusive view of citizenship supported

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<sup>29</sup> Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 29.

cultural pluralism in America. Since American nationalism changed so dramatically depending on who was invoking it (and what their reasoning was for doing so), a battle developed over the meaning of what it meant to be an American in the early twentieth century (the Irish participated in this war of words).<sup>30</sup>

Between the Union victory in the Civil War and the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1914, there was a struggle over who and what constituted the purest representation of America. By the time the lights went out in Europe, the American government had combined with right-wing organizations and nativists throughout the United States to form a racially restrictive, culturally conventional, and intensely militaristic brand of patriotism that stood in stark contrast to the more progressive and unrestricted visions of the country. John Higham contended that immigrants silenced many of their critics in the Civil War era through their assistance to the Union in its time of peril but that by the 1890s, a new exclusive patriotic American nationalism barred immigrants from the national fabric. During the First World War era, the drive for national unity again excluded immigrants. According to Higham, nativism was best defined as a form of nationalism in which immigrants were labeled as un-American, foreign, and thus, undesirable.<sup>31</sup> The Irish combated this by arguing that they represented the true form of American nationalism, as opposed to these exclusivists. By promoting universalistic citizenship rights, the Irish again stood up to nativists and steadfastly held that they were in fact more American than anyone else. Using Revolutionary doctrines to justify this stance was easy.

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<sup>30</sup> Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3-7.

<sup>31</sup> Cecelia O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-7; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 4.

Jonathan M. Hansen labeled many Progressive reformers (notably Jane Addams and W.E.B. DuBois) around the turn of the twentieth century as “cosmopolitan” patriots, reformers who wanted to reconcile American nationalism with the liberalism of the American Revolution. Those who adhered to this cosmopolitan patriotism wanted to spread the principles of American freedom across the entire globe. There were two branches of these cosmopolitan patriots. The universalists loathed any ethnic or racial distinctions and branded them as parochial and divisive, while the cultural pluralists celebrated these differences as the “sine qua non of human life.”<sup>32</sup> Like these Progressive reformers, Irish-American leaders promoted this “cosmopolitan” patriotism, albeit with their own objectives in mind.

The Irish fully embraced the American notion of citizenship by choice. British legal doctrine codified citizenship (or British subjecthood) as perpetual, so if one were born a British subject, one remained a British subject for life regardless of what country that person lived in or whether or not the individual professed any allegiance to the British government. American colonists had viewed citizenship in a different light, more as a contractual entity between citizen and state. The term citizenship itself implied a choice, unlike subjecthood. Thomas Jefferson always supported expatriation as a natural right, while Federalists like Alexander Hamilton claimed that it required the consent of the government.<sup>33</sup> The Irish embraced the Jeffersonian ideal, and in doing so, claimed that their view of citizenship was the most American one.

Fenianism brought the citizenship issue to the forefront in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Fenian movement was started by Young Irelanders James Stephens and

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003), xiv-xv. Sine qua non roughly translates as an indispensable entity.

<sup>33</sup> Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire*, 175-177.

John O'Mahony. O'Mahony founded the American wing of the organization, officially the Fenian Brotherhood, while Stephens organized the Irish counterpart to the Fenians, the Irish revolutionary Brotherhood (later the Irish Republican Brotherhood). The American wing, largely unfazed by the opposition of the Catholic Church and emboldened by anti-British sentiments across the North, grew quickly. The first National Convention of the Fenian Brotherhood met in Chicago in November 1863 and established a Head Centre under O'Mahony and a Central Council, along with officially recognizing the Republic of Ireland. The American Fenians attempted to avoid partisan politics as best they could. The rhetoric, especially at the 1863 meeting, was prohibitively American in nature, with members pledging allegiance to the United States and the American Constitution.<sup>34</sup>

The Fenians eventually added a War Department, and they prepared to invade Canada after the Civil War, hoping to ignite a war between the United States and Great Britain whereby Ireland would emerge as an independent nation. As with so many organizations during the interwar period, the Fenians splintered into a number of factions all bickering about the appropriate way forward. The William R. Roberts group called themselves the "men of action" and pushed the Canadian invasion, which was planned and executed by Brigadier-General Thomas Sweeny, who had lost his right arm in the Mexican-American War. John O'Mahony's wing opposed the Canadian invasion and tried issuing Irish Republic bonds. Sweeny had requested ten thousand soldiers for the invasion but only one thousand showed up to cross the Niagara River with Colonel John O'Neill on May 31, 1866. Despite an initial victory at Ridgeway, the U.S. government

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<sup>34</sup> Leon O'Broin, *Fenian Fever: An Anglo-American Dilemma* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 1-5; Joe Ambrose, *The Fenian Anthology* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2008), 115-116.

cut their supply lines and encouraged them to return home. Subsequent raids in the early 1870s returned similar results.<sup>35</sup>

The British government arrested over one hundred Irish-American Fenians in the British Isles between mid-September and mid-October 1865, and Secretary of State William Henry Seward actually told the British Minister to the United States, Sir Frederick Bruce, that the Irish had done so much for the Union during the Civil War that their ambitions could not be ignored by the American government. Furthermore, when the Fenians invaded Canada, both parties began courting them as a large voting bloc. Traditionally overwhelmingly Democratic, even the Republicans recognized their large numbers and reached out to Irish voters. Fenianism claimed the mantle of spreading “the cause of liberty everywhere,” so the Republican Party could court the Irish and spin it as support for a globalization of republicanism in an era of distrust between the United States and Great Britain. What would have horrified nativists just a decade earlier now had their major political party reaching out to the perpetrators and both major parties celebrating these culprits as champions of republicanism. Ironically, while the Fenians fell far short of liberating Ireland, the movement helped cement their Americanism. Americans embraced their calls for American-style republicanism all across the globe, and an American identity was born out of this. Their voting power forced mainstream

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<sup>35</sup> W.S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 28-34, 62-72. For a thorough biography of Sweeny, see Jack Morgan, *Through American and Irish Wars: The Life and Times of General Thomas W. Sweeny, 1820-1892* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005). Radical Fenian nationalists and the Catholic Church offered social cohesion and comfort to displaced the transported Irish in America. They came into conflict with one another over influence in Irish-American circles, and the Catholic Church worried that radical Fenian behavior would reverse the progress and acceptance of the church in the United States – see Oliver P. Rafferty, *The Church, the State, and the Fenian Threat, 1861-1875* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), 81. In addition, religious and secular factions of Fenians split off, and their sister organization in Ireland (the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, under James Stephens) grew irritated with the Fenians proclaiming an Irish republic and argued with O’Mahony about using French officers to assist the proposed Irish revolution (the Fenians insisted Stephens wait until the Civil War ended so they could assist) – see Mabel Gregory Walker, *The Fenian Movement* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publishers, Inc., 1969), 33-36.

politicians to embrace them. When fighting for citizenship, the Irish *acted* as Americans, not as Irishmen. A new paradigm for determining who belonged in the American populace had developed, where loyalty trumped race or ethnicity.<sup>36</sup>

Paul C. Nagel claimed that nineteenth-century America underwent a struggle to “find ourselves” as the concept of nationality dominated American political thought. What exactly constituted an American was up for debate. While American-style democracy was obviously key, protecting the individual from the people also colored American nationality. In the nineteenth century, the paradox of an overwhelmingly localized American populace held together by universalistic guiding principles meant that very little held the scattered nation together other than the Revolutionary principles that helped color American nationality. Americans largely rejected English citizenship doctrines and held that citizenship was a choice, however, this made WASP claims of exclusive rights to American-ness exceedingly difficult to justify, especially following the Civil War.<sup>37</sup> The American Irish always rejected these WASP notions and steadfastly held to a view of an inclusive and open American citizenship.

Susannah Ural Bruce argued that the Irish connected American and Irish independence during the American Civil War, which fostered the formation of a dual national identity for that generation of Irish Americans. So long as the Union war effort dovetailed with their objectives, they joined the Union Army. When these ideals

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<sup>36</sup> While most Fenians remained loyal to the Democrats (along with Confederate sympathizer John Mitchel, who compared the domineering North’s power over the South to the British relationship to Ireland), some became neutral or turned to the Republicans thinking that the Democrats had used Irish Americans and taken them for granted. – see Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 12, 44-46; Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire*, 179-193, 214-219, 233-234.

<sup>37</sup> Paul C. Nagel, *This Sacred Trust: American Nationality, 1798-1898* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1971), xi; John Higham, “Integrating America: The Problem of Assimilation in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1, no. 1(Fall 1981): 12-16.

conflicted, however, they chose Irish America over the United States and abandoned the Union cause. The change in war objectives with the release of the Emancipation Proclamation, coupled with rising casualty rates, particularly in the Irish Brigade, discouraged the Irish and eroded their support. While Bruce's contention regarding the existence of a dual national identity is convincing, it fails to address the manner in which Irish-American leaders attempted to portray themselves first and foremost as Americans. By articulating an Irish social construction of "America" based on American historical legitimacy and justification and demonizing American political adversaries as "un-American," these Irish leaders enveloped all of their competing identities together. According to Ella Lonn, this dual loyalty actually reinforced itself: "for the Irish, loyalty to America did not diminish loyalty to Ireland."<sup>38</sup>

William L. Burton asserted that the Civil War expedited the assimilation process for immigrants, as many troops felt they would earn their American stripes through their military service. Burton emphasizes ethnic Irish nationalism, on both sides of the Atlantic, in his thesis. General Thomas Francis Meagher (leader of the famed Irish Brigade) and many other Irish leaders claimed that Irish soldiers were superior to other troops. Burton claimed that cultural chauvinism pervaded Irish recruiting drives; the notion that the Irish were simply more virtuous than others drove the recruiting efforts and led to large numbers of Irish serving in all-Irish units. Many Irish joined General James A. Mulligan's 23<sup>rd</sup> Illinois regiment just for the opportunity to fight with fellow

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<sup>38</sup> Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 41; Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 659.

Irishmen. According to Burton, “The best-kept secret of the ethnic regiments is how truly American they were.”<sup>39</sup>

In his study of Irish-American cultural nationalism, Stephen Rohs demonstrated how music and other forms of Irish performance during the nineteenth century served as an Irish-American sensibility. Irish-American arts projected the image of bold Irish masculinity steeped in the tradition and nostalgia, which perpetuated notions of nationalistic mythology that harkened back to a mythical time of a utopian Irish independence. As a result, a Celtic national pride grew as a rival to Anglo-Saxonism.<sup>40</sup>

According to Dale T. Knobel and George M. Fredrickson, nativists like the Know-Nothings claimed that American nationality was a cultural entity; education and acculturation qualified individuals for American citizenship as opposed to place of birth. Thus, their hatred of the Irish stemmed from what they perceived to be rather un-American behaviors and attitudes and the seeming reluctance on the part of the Irish to fully embrace American values. While Irish participation in the Civil War temporarily assuaged these concerns, the early twentieth century saw a rise in a new brand of discrimination. The American nationalism of that era was couched in Social Darwinism. A pseudo-scientific Anglo-Saxonism arose and the One Hundred Percent Americanism campaigns of the era demonstrate just how little tolerance existed for cultural pluralism in America. According to Lawrence H. Fuchs, American civic culture had been highly racialized until the latter decades of the twentieth century. The civic culture of the nineteenth century had prohibited the Irish, whose strange habits, mannerisms, and

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<sup>39</sup> William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), x-xi, 51-52, 69-70, 120, 233.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Rohs, *Eccentric Nation: Irish Performance in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (Madison, Teanecks: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 19-20, 76, 85-87.

authoritarian religion rendered them unfit for inclusion in the American civic culture. It was only through their embrace of American politics that they were ultimately able to integrate into American culture.<sup>41</sup> This study contends that while American nativists may indeed have attempted to marginalize or exclude the Irish from the national fabric, the Irish did exactly the same thing. They went on the offensive in both eras and used what they believed to be true Americanism to go on the offensive and carve out their own niche within mainstream American society.

Alienation has been another major theme in Irish-American historiography. Tracing the Irish-American nationalist movement from the Fenians up through the Irish War for Independence following the First World War, Thomas N. Brown illustrated how anger over rejection from their fellow Americans led the American Irish to fight for an independent Ireland as a way to garner respect for their downtrodden masses. Unlike their Irish brethren, Irish-Americans had seen the United States and blamed England for the conditions back home. As such, Irish-American nationalism was born out of loneliness and deprivation. Irish-American nationalism sprung from their experiences in both the United States and Ireland. In trying to establish themselves in America, loneliness and alienation pervaded; this led directly to the formation of Irish-American nationalist organizations. The Irish of this era felt that their position in the United States was what it was because of the non-existence of an Irish nation, and they sought to change that. In his extraordinarily meticulous book on Irish emigration, Kerby A. Miller proclaimed that upon arriving in North America, the Irish experienced a profound sense

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<sup>41</sup> Dale T. Knobel and George M. Fredrickson, "A History of Discrimination," in *Prejudice: Dimensions of Ethnicity*, ed. Thomas F. Pettigrew et al., (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 73-81; Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), 42-48.

of cultural loss. They then developed an angst because they did not fit in to their new environment, so the Irish developed a collective exile complex.<sup>42</sup> Whatever it was born out of, this nationalism can tell us a great deal about the way these Irish leaders used American patriotism to suit their own wartime needs.

### **Conclusion**

While numerous scholars across an array of disciplines have analyzed these subjects, no previous study has dissected the ways in which distinct generations of a particular ethnic group justified their political dissent using their Americanism. They labeled those with whom they disagreed as un-American, seeking to pervert and destroy the legacy of 1776. Irish newspapers and periodicals claimed they were the most American citizens in the country. Nativism, politicians with whom they disagreed, and anything English were all un-American. Irish-American leaders defined their Americanism by interpreting and disseminating their own views of American history, notably the American Revolution. They cherry-picked the rhetoric of the Revolution to

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966), 23, 43, 63-64. Mary C. Kelly challenged these views that Irish-American identity formation took place as a result of the disillusionment and alienation experienced in the United States. Kelly argued that the Irish transported their social, cultural, and political experiences from Ireland to America, where a dual-culture formed that was not entirely American or Irish in nature – see Mary C. Kelly, *The Shamrock and the Lily: The New York Irish and the Creation of a Transatlantic Identity, 1845-1921* (New York: Peter Long, 2005), 7. Kelly had picked up on an important theme in Kerby Miller's book, which was that the concept of emigration as exile was indigenous to Irish-American culture (it manifested itself in other Irish emigration destinations, such as Australia and Canada) - see Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). A number of good studies on the Irish Famine itself came out during the tragic event's sesquicentennial during the 1990's. A late addition to this flood of scholarship is Cormac O'Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, economy, and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), which built upon the recent scholarship. For valuable essays on the Great Famine's historical memory and meaning, see also Patrick O'Sullivan, editor, *The Meaning of the Famine* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), Donald MacRaild, editor, *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), and James S. Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2001).

sanction their politics. It was difficult to call someone un-American or unpatriotic if George Washington had uttered the same thing. They claimed a plethora of Revolutionary War heroes as their own and proclaimed that Irish Catholics were largely responsible for the victory in the Revolutionary War. In doing so, they used their memory and interpretation of U.S. history as a way of hedging against the frequent accusations of disloyalty lobbed at the “foreign” Irish.

To fully comprehend all facets of Irish-American national identity and nationalism, the subjects in this dissertation must be considered. Scholars of ethnicization, American nationalism, patriotism, whiteness, Irish-American nationalism, and Irish-American national identity have all contributed well to this exceedingly complex topic, and all of these ideas played a role. Hence, this dissertation seeks to add to this intellectual parley. The way that Irish-American immigrants thought about and articulated their ideas about what it meant to be an American and how that best suited them belongs in this discussion.

## CHAPTER II – “BECAUSE THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS AND HAS BEEN DEVOTED TO THE UNION”: IRISH-AMERICAN UNIONISM

### Introduction

The Irish clung steadfastly to their particular conception of Unionism throughout the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The Irish supported the Union war effort until the war objectives changed, thus rendering moot this sense of Unionism (and thus, their primary war objective). Irish leaders explained why they were opposed to the war effort by arguing that the Union war effort violated the basic principles of American freedom and republicanism that the Founding Fathers had set out in 1776. In doing so, they could launch an assault against Republican policies while covering themselves against accusations of disloyalty or unpatriotic behavior. The Union for which these Irish-American leaders claimed they were fighting protected individual rights above all else. Any action taken by the federal government that could be construed as undermining individual liberty was deemed as un-American and antithetical to the principles established by the Founding Fathers.

The manner in which Irish-American newspapers reported several key junctures during the Civil War illustrate these points. While most of the Irish leaders deemed secession to be unwise, many of them objected to the forcible coercion of the seceding states back into the Union. They labeled these actions un-American and used the words of certain Founders to showcase how this violated the true essence of America. A minority of loud-mouthed separatists was largely to blame for the secession crisis, argued many Irish leaders, but the federal government had overreacted. If the South wanted to

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to American “Unionism,” certainly not British “Unionism.”

go, they should be allowed to leave. Being an American was a choice, and if one chose not to be an American, one had the right to do so without the threat of military action by a tyrannous centralized government.

There existed two main strands of Irish-American nationalism between the arrival of the Famine Irish and the 1870s, according to William Joyce. One line of thinking was the Parliamentary, Catholic, and constitutionalist line, while the other was the more radical, violent, and revolutionary nationalist strand. Bryan P. McGovern has framed this dichotomy as a parliamentary vs. revolutionary qualification, with the Catholic Church opposing the ecumenical, revolutionary strand of Irish-American nationalism. The Civil War tended to blur these lines though. Some Irish-American periodicals tended to be more radical than others, but they all generally followed a similar path. Most papers tended to support the Union until Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation. At that point, the Union the Irish were fighting for and the union the federal government was fighting for diverged. When analyzing how these papers qualified their Americanism, however, these divisions are overblown. Regardless of which side a given Irishman or Irish periodical fell on, however, they always touted themselves as the purest embodiment of true Americanism.<sup>2</sup>

The only thing that bound all Irish Americans together and the chief comprehensive component of Irish-American sensibilities during the Civil War era was the Americanism they developed and promoted. The immigrant press played a vital role for immigrants arriving in America. These newspapers provided immigrants information regarding their place in America, as well as how they related to American culture and

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<sup>2</sup> William L. Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity: A History of the Irish-American Press, 1848-1883* (New York City: Arno Press, 1976), 90; Bryan P. McGovern, *John Mitchel: Irish Nationalist, Southern Secessionist* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 113-114.

their native culture. It was also the age of “personal journalism,” when newspaper editors exercised a tremendous deal of influence over their readerships. Patrick Donahoe published the *Pilot* for over sixty years, Patrick Lynch edited the New York *Irish-American* and led the paper to top all Irish nationalist publications in circulation by his death in 1857, when his stepson Patrick Sheehan took over, and James McMaster edited the New York *Freeman’s Journal* from 1848 to 1885. These men exerted tremendous influence helping mold and shape moderate Irish nationalism and Irish Catholicism to mainstream Americanism, assisting Irish immigrants in the process of assimilation. They wielded great influence in promoting Irish-American Unionism.<sup>3</sup>

While some Irish leaders stood by the decision for military action after Fort Sumter, their support for the Union war effort waned as Irish casualties mounted during 1861 and 1862. When Lincoln released the Emancipation Proclamation, Irish morale plummeted. The Emancipation Proclamation clearly constituted an overreach by the federal government into the daily lives of individual citizens. If the President could unilaterally seize people’s individual property, it constituted a dangerous precedent. Again, these Irish leaders pointed out that that Washington, Jefferson, and many other Founders had owned slaves and that it was clearly outside the purview of the federal government to regulate something of this nature. Irish newspapers claimed that the Republican war effort had betrayed the legacy of 1776, which constituted the primary cog in their Unionism.

Many Irish Americans distanced themselves from the New York City draft riots, but they also claimed that the riots were the natural outcome of the unconstitutional

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<sup>3</sup> Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 4-7. McMaster was a vehement Copperhead who ran into trouble with the Lincoln Administration during the war. For a biography, see Mary D. Kwitchen, *James Alphonsus McMaster: A Study in American Thought* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1949).

Conscription Act. The Irish had turned out in droves to fight for the Union, but in their Union, one could not be forced into the army by the government. This was another example of how the Republican Party was trampling the Constitution and the principles of true liberty that the Founding Fathers had tried (apparently in vain) to bequeath to posterity. Thus, the Irish resistance to the draft was not unpatriotic, disloyal, or un-American but rather a manifestation of the truest form of Americanism, standing up to tyranny.

In the 1864 Presidential election, most Irish leaders and newspapers supported the candidacy of George B. McClellan, although some of the more militantly Copperhead papers even called him a traitor to the Jeffersonian way because of his tepid support for a negotiated peace. Only a full and immediate peace would suffice for many of the more radical elements in the Irish-American press. Voting for McClellan offered the Irish a democratic outlet for their mounting political frustrations. Moderate Irish Americans framed the election as one between tyranny and freedom. Their candidate represented freedom and liberty while Lincoln embodied tyranny and the destruction of American republicanism.

The very notion of Reconstruction also violated this Irish-American conception of Unionism. Their position reconciled the paradoxical idea that a state which had seceded illegally somehow had to earn its way back into the Union. Since becoming an American should be a choice, the Irish felt that a state that wanted back into the Union should be allowed back into the Union without precondition. Thus, the very concept of states being forced to pass legislation against their will in order to re-earn status as American states was preposterous. These Irish leaders proclaimed this loud and clear.

The way that the Irish-American press covered the Civil War provides keen insights into determining the nuances of Irish-American sensibilities during the conflict. The events selected for this chapter aptly demonstrate how Irish-American conceptions of Unionism and universal Americanism changed as Lincoln re-defined the war's objectives and casualties mounted. This chapter, as opposed to other topical chapters, analyzes these issues chronologically. Irish values never changed, but the evolution of the war and Republican politics made it appear that Irish sentiments had indeed shifted.<sup>4</sup>

Irish-American leaders framed Unionism as a political system that cherished individual freedom and denounced centralized power as tyranny. Within this view, the government should be prohibited from forcing any citizen from doing anything against that person's will. It identified with the Jeffersonian Democratic tradition in American politics, and the Irish relied on the statements of American heroes like Jefferson to substantiate their views. It allowed them to frame themselves as the truest purveyors of American Unionism while vociferously opposing the Union war effort. The manner in which these Irish-American leaders reported the major events of the Civil War speaks volumes as to their conception of Unionism during this time period. The events selected for this chapter best illustrate the evolution of the war objectives but more importantly, how Irish-American periodicals reported their divergence from Irish-American Unionism. The degree to which this Unionism was reflected in Union war objectives reflected the level of Irish-American morale, which plummeted after 1862. The Irish fought only for their conception of the Union, which demonstrates their consideration of what America meant.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to Northern Irish Catholics (specifically, the leaders of this group trying to influence larger Northern Irish Catholic public opinion).

### The Irish Blame Secession on Political Extremists

Irish leaders constantly blamed political extremists for unnecessarily provoking the Civil War. Abolitionists and secessionists were demagogues who had duped the moderate majority. The Irish always presented themselves as moderate American unionists, which they believed constituted the most American brand of politics. The Irish loathed the extremism on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line and blamed those secessionists and abolitionists for the crisis itself. A good example of how the American Irish viewed the sectional crisis as one exacerbated by the political fringes can be found by looking at how the *Pilot* reported on the issue of the statehood of Kansas well before shots had rung out at Sumter. The paper saw the issue as one created by “outsiders.” A “portion of the South, who desire to rush the new state in with a slavery constitution, and the free-soil party who are equally in a hurry to add another Free State to the Union.” The official position of the author was that a territorial government should suffice until the majority of people were ready to admit Kansas as a state. As early as January 1860, the *Pilot* was proclaiming “The Union: It Must be Preserved.” Quoting Daniel Webster, the *Pilot* went on to ominously predict that “We have melancholy proof that disunion is the forerunner of civil war, and civil war of national disunion.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Boston Pilot* (hereafter *Pilot*), April 24, 1858, January 7, 1860. The *Pilot* claimed a readership of 103,000 by 1872; it was known as the “Irishman’s Bible” and the “Apostle of the Irish.” Francis R. Walsh directly linked the *Pilot* with nineteenth-century Irish-American history itself: “the history of the *Pilot* during those years in many ways the history of the Irish in nineteenth century America.” The *Pilot* evolved over the course of the war, souring on the war effort after the Emancipation Proclamation (though not to the extent that other Irish periodicals did). It still remained steadfastly committed to improving the American socioeconomic position of the Irish throughout the era by promoting the American principles of their readers. A moderate Irish-American paper throughout, the *Pilot* is largely believed to accurately reflect the pulse of Irish America in the mid-nineteenth century – see Francis R. Walsh, “The Boston Pilot Reports the Civil War,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 9(1981): 5; Francis R. Walsh, “Who Spoke for Boston’s Irish? The Boston Pilot in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 21.

The Irish viewed the Republican Party as disunionists and fanatics and wanted a new political party solely to extol their Unionism. As one Father O'Reilly wrote to Judge Charles Patrick Daly during one of the more trying times for the Union war effort in July 1862, "Looking over our lines East and West, we have lost the game. King Lincoln is checkmated...his abolitionist knights, in their last move, have given victory to the Slave Power." By celebrating the actions of John Brown and other Black Republicans who were trying to "withhold from the South their equitable rights under the Constitution," free state fanatics were goading the "impulsive people into some acts of violence and more wildness of language." However, since each side felt that their view of the Constitution was the right one and that they were not in fact disunionists, "how can it be expected that any considerable portion of them will quit the Republican ranks for the purpose of forming a Union Party. The same is true of the South." According to the author of the editorial, "We hold the Southerner more excusable than the Northerner in their respective attitudes towards each other: but neither of them is loyal to the laws and the constitution." Despite the fact that the majority of citizens in each section did not favor disunion "on account of these violent or fanatic men," these political extremists precluded the citizens from seeing the necessity of founding a Union Party.<sup>6</sup>

Mirroring the sentiments of other Irish Americans, Captain David P. Conyngham also addressed the Irish motives for fighting. For Conyngham, the Irish (as well as all other nationalities) had a "vested right in the maintenance" of the American Union, and adopted citizens had "just the same right to fight for America that the native American had." He also cited the prospect of learning "the use of arms and the science of war" as a

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<sup>6</sup> Father O'Reilly to Judge Charles Patrick Daly, July 28, 1862, Box 3, Charles Patrick Daly Papers, New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL); *Pilot*, April 14, 1860.

lure for the American Irishman hoping to put them “to practical use in his own country” some day, but “the first duty of Irishmen as citizens of America is obedience to the Constitution and laws of the country.” Conyngham also noted that Irish-American soldiers had just as much reason to fight as any native-born soldier did in dismissing the notion that the Irish were mercenaries. Irish-American soldier P.S. Davitt also felt that foreigners such as the Irish had just as much claim and just as much stake in the American flag as “true born Americans” did, and he felt it necessary to stop the desecration of “Constitutional liberty.”<sup>7</sup>

Irish commitment to the American Union, however, was also threatened by the extremists from the other side of the Potomac; the Irish also held disdain for the fire-eaters who hastened the collapse of the Union. Irish Americans were actually political moderates during the Civil War era, as opposed to their reputation as rabble-rousers and rioters. As famed Irish Brigade General Thomas Francis Meagher said, while he had been “a revolutionist in Ireland, I am a conservative in America.”<sup>8</sup> Most American Irish

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<sup>7</sup> Captain David Power Conyngham, *The Irish Brigade and its Campaigns: with some account of the Corcoran legion and sketches of the principle officers* (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1869), 6, 8. Conyngham fought under Meagher and published his memoirs in 1869. He would argue that all the Irish needed to do was look at Ireland when deciding whom to fight for in the American Civil War. In Conyngham’s understanding of Irish history, it was divisiveness amongst supposed leaders that had allowed for English overlordship, and he denigrated those supposed leaders (presumably the O’Brien dynasty of pre-Norman Ireland) as the “Jefferson Davises” of Ireland who had divided the country and taken control of the South – see Conyngham, *Irish Brigade and Its Campaigns*, 60; *Irish-American*, August 17, 1861. The *Irish-American* was a secular paper in New York City that, for the most part, avoided overtly embracing Copperhead ideology. A popular Irish-American periodical, 33,000 Irish subscribed to the weekly *Irish-American* in 1861, which made up a sizable portion of the Irish population in New York City. A Fenian paper, the *Irish-American* was more pragmatic than were the other major periodicals. They wanted an Irish war with Canada and Britain, and they supported the Union war effort to the end, though they did distinguish between their objectives and those of the Republicans in charge. While it still soured on the war effort after 1863 like other more radical papers, the *Irish-American* avoided outright sedition – see Mick Mulcrone, “The Famine Irish and the Irish-American Press,” *American Journalism* 20, no. 3(2003): 49-51; Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 7, 31; Edward K. Spann, “Union Green: The Irish Community and the Civil War,” in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (eds.), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 194.

<sup>8</sup> Meagher quoted in Ofele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 34. According to Meagher, if Ireland had the same problems as South Carolina did, there would never have been any reason for an Irish revolution – see Rory

deplored both secessionists and abolitionists and blamed these fringe elements for the Civil War itself. Secessionists were trying to split the Great Republic apart, while abolitionists seemed hell bent on destroying the freedoms that the Union stood for in the first place. In keeping with their view of America, the American Irish also largely felt that forcing the seceded states back into the Union with military occupation was at odds with the most fundamental tenets of America. America was there for those who wanted to be Americans, and while that was a sacred union indeed, many Irish felt that coercing rogue states that wished to be out of the Union back into it was un-American. States, like

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T. Cornish, "An Irish Republican Abroad: Thomas Francis Meagher in the United States, 1852-1865" in *Thomas Francis Meagher: The Making of an Irish American*, ed. John M. Hearne and Rory T. Cornish (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 147. Thomas Francis Meagher is a fascinating figure in Irish and American history. After being exiled to Van Diemen's Land due to his role in the failed 1848 Rising in Ireland, Meagher escaped to the United States. A southern sympathizer who felt it his duty to defend the union, he took command of the Irish Brigade in the Civil War. Beloved by the troops in his Irish Brigade, contemporaries often accused him of rampant drunkenness, even in battle. He resigned his command after War Secretary Stanton denied his request to replenish the ranks of his decimated Brigade in 1863. After an appointment as the territorial governor of Montana, he mysteriously drowned in July 1867. Early biographies were hagiographical in nature – for an example, see W.F. Lyons, *Brigadier-General Thomas Francis Meagher: His Political and Military Career; with Selections from his Speeches and Writings* (New York: Sadlier & Co., 1870). See also Michael Cavanaugh, *Memoirs of General Thomas Francis Meagher, comprising the leading events of his career* (Worcester: The Messenger Press, 1892). For a more objective (and ultimately, negative) assessment of Meagher's life, see Robert Athearn, *Thomas Francis Meagher: An Irish Revolutionary in America* (New York City: Arno Press, 1976). Athearn paints the picture of an ambitious, drunken glory hound, accusations not entirely unfounded. For a recent and exhaustively thorough biography of Meagher, see Paul R. Wylie, *The Irish General: Thomas Francis Meagher* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). For a critical look at Meagher's wartime activities, including his recruiting efforts, against the backdrop of nineteenth-century Irish-American life and hardships, see Daniel M. Callaghan, *Thomas Francis Meagher and the Irish Brigade in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006). Like Athearn, Callaghan argues that Meagher has been given a free pass by historians (in light of his fascinating life story). For a balanced work arguing that Meagher's chief faults lie in poor executive decision-making and lack of a proper sense of limits but that his motivational and leadership qualities greatly contributed to his fascinating rise to glory, see John A. French, "The Active One: Thomas Francis Meagher's Adventures in the Young Ireland Movement, the American Civil War, and Territorial Montana," (M.A. Thesis, University of Wyoming, 2006). Meagher's Irish Brigade is also the subject of many works. For a first-hand account of the Irish Brigade, see Conyngham, *The Irish Brigade and its Campaigns*. A recent book that focuses on the Irish Brigade's military engagements is Phillip Thomas Tucker, "*God Help the Irish!*" *The History of the Irish Brigade* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2007). For a collection of articles detailing the leaders, engagements, and motivations of the Irish brigade, see Pia Seija Seagrave, editor, *The History of the Irish Brigade: A Collection of Historical Essays* (Fredericksburg: Sgt. Kirkland's Museum and Historical Society, 1997). For a military history of all the Irish units fighting for the Union, see Frank A. Boyle, *A Party of Mad Fellows: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Army of the Potomac* (Dayton, OH: Morning Shore, 1996).

individual citizens, should have the freedom to choose whether or not they wanted to be American.

The *Freeman's Journal* chastised southern extremists and called for moderates to defuse the situation. Despite the obvious opposition to abolition, the *Freeman's Journal* also opposed the expansion of slavery through a re-opening of the slave trade. They called for “*national* men from all quarters” to “ostracize the sectional champions and disunion agitators,” as all Americans needed to appreciate that the “prosperity, welfare, and harmony of the Union are destined to throw into the shade all past national achievements.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite its opposition to the concept in practice, the *Freeman's Journal* also felt that secession was a constitutionally-protected right and thus labeled the opposing side as proponents of “coercion.” The *Freeman's Journal* asked “Why cannot we live in this Union as the fathers made it – some States slave-holding, and some States free?” Those who wished to coerce the southern states back into the nation as opposed to using constitutionalism would cause “the whole bond of the Union” to “crumble away.” Politicizing this as an issue of Americanism, the writer added that “Every true American revolts at such a proposition.”<sup>10</sup>

The Irish characterized the compulsion of the South back into the Union as un-American. One section of the country was looking to establish control over a separate section of the country, which the author deemed to be “in violation of the very foundations of American institutions.” The Irish saw the prospect of ideological warfare as old-fashioned and akin to solving Old World squabbles, not American disputes.

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<sup>9</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, October 1, 1859.

<sup>10</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, January 26, 1861.

Hurdling “hundreds of thousands against each other, for an ‘idea,’ or for a whim – accomplishing nothing, settling no question thereby, but making tens of thousand of widows, and hundreds of thousands of orphans” was for European despots, not “we of the United States,” who “have set them an example of true Christian civilization.”<sup>11</sup> If it was necessary to fight a war to bully dissident secessionists to return to America, then they should be allowed to go their own way.

Expressing alarm that Republican victory in November 1860 threatened the Union, the *Herald* blamed extremists of all persuasions for the crisis and aligned themselves with Thomas Jefferson on the issue. In an editorial discussing the secession rhetoric coming from the South, the paper quoted the Declaration of Independence and James Madison’s writings in pleading for “every other resort before that of revolution, for the redress of political grievances, and for all other grievances, whether moral, religious, civil, or constitutional!” For those advocating Civil War in late 1860, “the Revolutionists and Firebrands, religious and political, on either side of Mason and Dixon’s line, may be assured that *they* will be compelled, by the determination of the *peaceful secessionists* to submit to be *concessionists* [sic], in the most patriotic sense of the word, as Mr. Jefferson was.”<sup>12</sup> While lauding Jefferson for his states’ rights platform and crediting him with the

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<sup>11</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, April 6, 1861.

<sup>12</sup> *Catholic Herald*, November 24, 1860; December 1, 1860. The *Catholic Herald & Visitor* of Philadelphia, also named the *Universe* (hereafter *Catholic Herald*) claimed to represent the interests and views of Philadelphia’s Irish Catholics during the Civil War. It was the Roman Catholic Archdiocese’s official organ at the time. It has been labeled a secessionist and pro-Southern periodical, but these qualifications were unfair. Lukewarm to the Republican agenda and indifferent to the plight of slaves, it was still determined to support the war effort. The editor was Southern sympathizer but self-described American patriot John Duffey until October 12, 1861, when the archdiocese anonymously edited the paper until November 1863. Moderate Democrat James M. Spellissy then took over until 1870. As an ardent old-school Jeffersonian Democrat, Duffey accepted nullification and secession as legal albeit unnecessary. In his mind, there were numerous examples of nullification in American history, including when the North passed personal liberty laws to protect runaway slaves. While he called for the North to let South Carolina “go in peace!” he reluctantly accepted the reality that the nation was going to war. Duffey made sure to remind readers all the insults directed at Irish immigrants made by Republicans. For example, the *Herald*

initial introduction of the concept of nullification, the *Herald* recommended constitutionalism and moderation as the appropriate recourses.

Despite Irish America's abhorrence of disunion, Irish Americans steadfastly opposed using coercion against those renegade states to force them back into the Union. In response to South Carolina's secession, the *Herald* "said to ourselves, musingly, let her go in peace! There is no power in the Constitutional compact to detain her – therefore, we repeated, let her go in peace!" As true defenders of states' rights, the authors pointed out that "this *right* of secession, which has been so long and so ardently maintained, in the North and the South, the East and the West – defensible as we believe it to be on constitutional grounds – will produce the most solid benefits for the entire population of the States." In their view, South Carolina had even "acted wisely, justly" in seceding. To these unyielding strict constructionists, it was actually the "mistake of some of the Northern and Western States, the great misapprehension of their own reserved rights, which has caused all the private sufferings of the people."<sup>13</sup>

Unlike other Irish-American newspapers, the *Irish-American* rejected the principle that secession was an inherent right held by individual states, though it too initially opposed forcing them back into the union. After the secession of Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi, the New York *Irish-American* proclaimed that those states had even less a right to secede than South Carolina had. At least South Carolina had at once point held "independent sovereignty," unlike the other states, which thus had no

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made sure to bring up *Harper's Weekly's* accusation of Irish "ignorance and superstition" after the 69<sup>th</sup> New York for their refusal to honor the Prince of Wales in an 1860 parade. The *Herald* roundly rejected extremism on both sides and was a moderate, Catholic-leaning periodical – see Joseph George, Jr., "Philadelphia's *Catholic Herald*: The Civil War Years," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 103, no. 2(April 1979): 196 - 202.

<sup>13</sup> *Catholic Herald*, December 29, 1860; January 12, 1861.

principle, “save successful revolution” on which to revolt. The *Irish-American* attested that no state had “any such right” under the Constitution and that New England states had also tried such a stunt when they disagreed with President Madison during the War of 1812. Even as late as February 1861, though, the paper regretted that “any of our fellow-countrymen should be misled by the bad example of so many native-born Americans, who have already proffered similar services with a haste and indiscretion which cannot be characterized as otherwise than indecent.” While it was illegal for the southern states to secede, it was also “unconstitutional for citizens of Massachusetts to endeavor to coerce those of South Carolina by a menacing display of force, as it is for the latter to seek to compel the General Government to secede to their demands by threatening to take Fort Sumpter [sic].” In a letter from “A Union Man,” subjugating the South to coerce them back into the Union was viewed as destroying “‘the Republic’ and the very principles on which it was founded.” According to the “Union Man,” coercing the South would turn Southerners into “*subjects*” of the Union, thus ending the United States’ run as a government “deriving its power from the consent of the governed.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Record* even used George Washington’s writings to argue that fanaticism was the real culprit in dividing the Union and that it was necessary to think of Washington and thus “frown on any attempt to treat the South as a conquered nation.” The framers of the Constitution had deemed abolitionism “inexpedient” and had taken steps to secure the “existence and perpetuity” of the institution, so it was deemed acceptable by the most American of all men. If it was good enough for Washington (and the Irish), it should be good enough for all Americans. In the *Record*’s July 4, 1862 article, the author professed that conservatives had been misled into a fight between the “two hostile elements of

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<sup>14</sup> *Irish-American*, January 19, 1861; January 26, 1861; February 16, 1861; March 8, 1861.

slavery and abolitionism” and that “every true patriot” should heed the warnings of George Washington and work against all forms of sectionalism.<sup>15</sup>

Sergeant James P. Sullivan of the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers blamed fanaticism on both sides for the outbreak of hostilities, with political troublemakers ratcheting up the rhetoric to a fever pitch and plunging the nation into an unnecessary war. While northern demagogues had ignored the decisions of the Supreme Court (especially the Dred Scott decision) and encouraged other citizens to do the same, the constitutional election of Lincoln “afforded a pretext to the Southern demagogues (though they planned to bring about that event) to fire the Southern heart with cries that he would free the slaves; that he would deprive the Southern people of their rights under the constitution; prevent Southern men from acquiring lands in the territories; yet again they were very careful not to say how he could do it.” Sullivan felt the fate of the South was sealed after Sumter and his tone changed at that point. After the fort had been fired upon, “the people felt that the

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<sup>15</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, March 1, 1862; April 5, 1862; July 5, 1862. The *Metropolitan Record* (or the *Record*), officially the mouthpiece of the New York Archdiocese until Archbishop John Hughes severed it from the diocese due to its increasingly radical rhetoric, followed the political trajectory of the *Freeman's Journal*. Editor John Mullaly was arrested in 1864 for publishing “incendiary, disloyal, and traitorous articles” – see Spann, “Union Green,” 208. While these papers initially were sympathetic to the Southern cause, they came down on the side of the union once the news of the bombardment of Fort Sumter had made its way to New York. These two papers were ardently Democratic, however, and the Emancipation Proclamation really changed their rhetoric. They refused to even back the 1864 McClellan campaign because of his lukewarm reception to peace; by that juncture, these papers had become militantly Copperhead. By the latter stages of the war, these papers viewed the restoration of the Union as an impossibility and they came to mock the Union war effort and Republican leadership. Since their rigidly-held notion of the union had long since become a thing of the past, they came to consider any Irishman fighting for what had become of the Union war effort to be a unique brand of mercenary soldier – see George, Jr., “Philadelphia’s *Catholic Herald*,” 207. Hughes proudly flew the American flag above the New York Cathedral, as he was a proud Unionist. Embarrassed by the New York City draft riots, the bloodshed had taken its toll on Hughes by summer 1863 and he sought a peaceful resolution – see Shaw, *Dagger John*, 339, 359, 366.

secessionists had forfeited all their right under the Constitution by treasonably making war against our government.”<sup>16</sup>

Irish-American Sergeant Peter Welsh (a soldier in the Irish 28<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts) also felt that the seceding states were out of line, despite sympathizing with them against northern extremists. Citing St. Paul as an authority, Welsh proclaimed that “rebellion without a just cause is a crime of the greatest magnitude.” And while the “fanatics [sic] of the north were the aggressors [sic] by their party platforms and agitation,” he maintained that “no man of sound just judgement [sic] will say that was a sufficient cause for armed rebellion.” Preventing the fracturing of the American Union and thus keeping America as a sanctuary open to all was the primary fighting motive of Private William McCarter, who enlisted in the 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania of the Irish Brigade on August 23, 1862. In his memoir, he explained how he “owed my life to my whole adopted country, not the North or the South, nor the East, nor the West, but the Union, one and inseparable.” Like so many Irish-Americans, McCarter also tied the preservation of the American Union to its continued status as a worldwide sanctuary, “ever ready to welcome and to extend the hand of friendship to the down-trodden and oppressed of every clime and people.” This sanctuary had to be protected from extremists throughout America. McCarter claimed that he had joined the Union Army to “prevent the Union’s dissolution by the traitors of the North, as well as those of the South.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James P. Sullivan, *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Memoirs of James P. Sullivan, Sergeant, Company K, 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers*, ed. William Beaudot and Lance J. Herdegan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Welsh to his wife, February 3, 1863, in Peter Welsh, *Irish Green and Union Blue: The Civil War Letters of Peter Welsh, Color Sergeant 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, ed. Lawrence Frederick Kohl (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 65; Private William McCarter, *My Life in the Irish Brigade: The Civil War Memoirs of Private William McCarter, 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry*, ed. Kevin E. O’Brien (Campbell, CA: Savas Publishing, 1996), ix, 221.

The Irish fought for the Union, not for the North. The *Irish-American* condemned secession as illegal, but it also condemned the militarism of native-born Americans who wished to violently subdue the rebellion. The *Irish-American* pleaded that secession was illegal and unnecessary. Equating secession with revolution, the paper warned that “we cannot be induced to forswear the allegiance we have pledged to our adopted country to gratify the secessionists, by abetting them in their unwise and anti-national proceedings.” However, no armed revolution was yet advocated as a means to ending the Southern rebellion. Lamenting the actions of the Massachusetts Irish in Worcester, who had offered their services to the President of the United States in order to put down the rebellion, the *Irish-American* stated “regret that any of our fellow countrymen should be misled by the bad example of so many native-born Americans, who have already proffered similar services with a haste and indiscretion which cannot be characterized as otherwise than indecent.” The paper asserted that despite the illegality of the secession movement, the country should avoid armed force as a means to accomplishing the reintegration of the Southern states into the Union. Instead, the paper encouraged readers to avoid the fight against secession because “We deprecate the idea of Irish-Americans who have themselves suffered so much for opinions sake not only at home but here even, volunteering to coerce those with whom they have no direct connection.”<sup>18</sup> In Irish eyes, the North bore a great deal of responsibility for provoking secession. The crisis did not necessitate armed force since their constructions of the Constitution and Union, while certainly under fire, had yet to be seriously threatened. Peaceful reintegration was still an option; that would soon change.

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<sup>18</sup> Shannon, *The American Irish*, 55; *Irish-American*, January 26, 1861; *Irish-American* quoted in Spann, “Union Green,” 194.

The tone of the Irish-American press switched dramatically after the surrender of Fort Sumter. The *Irish-American* lamented the failure of cooler heads to prevail, but it called upon the duty of its readers to defend the adopted country since hostilities had ended any chance of conciliation and negotiation between the two sides. The *Irish-American* asked its readers to support the Union: “Irish-Americans, we call on you by the sacred memories of the past, by your remembrance of the succor extended to your suffering brethren...to be true to the land of your adoption in this crisis of her fate.” After the War officially had begun, calls for troops and organizations to assist the families of those enlisting peppered the pages of the *Irish-American*. The paper asked that “friends of the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment in this and the adjoining cities should bestir themselves to form a regular organization to look after and take care of the wives and children of such of the men that have left after them families needing assistance.” Calls for volunteers for the Irish Zouaves under Meagher, for the 75<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and for the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment appeared in the paper in May 1861. The *Irish-American* reported on the committee elections for the fund to assist families of soldiers fighting in the 69<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment. The following week, the paper published a list of the people that had contributed financially to the fund, along with the size of the corresponding donation.<sup>19</sup> After it had become undeniably clear that conciliation and negotiation would not work, the Irish threw their support behind the Union war effort. The Northern cause and the cause for the preservation of the Irish construction of the Union were one and the same, for the time being.

While the American Irish considered secessionists and abolitionists both culpable for the sectionalism that threatened their precious American Union, most remained

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish-American*, April 20, 1861; May 4, 1861; May 11, 1861; May 18, 1861.

sympathetic to the Southern cause throughout the secession crisis, at least until the firing on Fort Sumter. The American Irish tended to identify, at least politically, with the states' rights South, and they largely opposed using military force to coerce these rogue states back into the Union. After the firing on Fort Sumter, though, things changed. The Irish-American devotion to the American Union trumped their political sympathy with the plight of the South. Nevertheless, they remained steadfastly devoted to their brand of Americanism, and as such, their support dwindled once the war effort became one to reconstruct the Union as opposed to preserving it.

For a good example of this change of heart, it is unnecessary to look any further than Meagher. A staunch Democrat prior to the Civil War, Meagher preferred calling secessionists the more honorable term "revolutionists" as opposed to "rebels." Nevertheless, he hurriedly changed his tune after the firing on Fort Sumter. It was the idea of American Union as the worldwide champion of freedom that caused the change of heart. He called preserving the American Union "not only our duty to America, but also to Ireland." The American Republic was "a mainstay of human freedom, the world over," and the success of preserving the Union carried with it the hopes of Irish freedom too, as it would be impossible to "succeed in our effort to make Ireland a Republic without the moral and material aid of the liberty-loving citizens of the United States."<sup>20</sup>

Irish-American soldier Maurice Sexton wrote his family in Ireland to explain that while he was a Southern sympathizer frustrated with the Republican leadership of the North, he was in awe of how, should the United States come under attack by another nation such as France or Great Britain, "the whole population of the United States would rise up in arms, and lay down their lives, their honors, and their riches at the altar of

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<sup>20</sup> Cavanaugh, *Memoirs of General Thomas Francis Meagher*, 367-369.

liberty and sacrifice the whole from the laws and Constitution of the United States, the best and most liberal government in the world.” Irish-American soldier James McKay Rorty felt that the United States was threatened by tyrannous Northern Puritan fanatics and Southern Oligarchs alike. “Our only guarantee is the Constitution, our only safety is the Union, one and indivisible,” he declared.<sup>21</sup>

After the firing on Fort Sumter, Irish-American sensibilities united in opposition to the secessionist traitors. On the morning of April 27, 1861, word that a ship from Savannah, Georgia had cruised into Boston Harbor truculently waving its Confederate flag spread through Boston. A mob assembled, made up primarily of Irishmen, and “intimidated” the captain into lowering the banner and surrendering it to the horde, which proceeded to tear it into tatters and parade that through the city streets. Most Irish believed that the regular people of the South had been duped into seceding anyway, and they took the opportunity to stand up for the American Union. In a May 1861 speech, Richard O’Gorman, a prominent Irish-American attorney in New York City (and a former member of the nationalistic Young Ireland) professed that the South had been “deceived, cruelly deceived, by demagogues” and that it was the duty of the Irish-born citizens to stand and fight for the Constitution and to prevent the dissolution of the Union.<sup>22</sup>

Irish-American newspapers mirrored these sentiments. *The Metropolitan Record*, while certainly not endorsing Abraham Lincoln, pointed out to readers that the South had seceded based on what Lincoln *might* do (as opposed to anything that he had done).

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<sup>21</sup> Maurice Sexton quoted in Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 61; James McKay Rorty quoted in Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 56; O’Gorman speech printed in *Catholic Herald*, May 4, 1861.

While the Southern states had every right to be annoyed by the overbearing policies and goals of the Republican Party, they had overreacted in seceding from the Union and firing on Fort Sumter. Lincoln had been elected according to “all the formalities which the Constitution provides” and had made “no official aggression...on the rights of the South since the inauguration.” The paper noted that the South “had made their minds up to secede” in the event Lincoln was elected, even though the South was at fault anyway, both for dividing the Democratic Party and for agreeing to the Constitutional process of electing a president in the first place. While the “South has had many grievances to complain of...none of them arose from overt acts of the administration,” and if they had merely proceeded within the confines of the American governmental system, “they could have tied up the hands of Mr. Lincoln with a silken thread.”<sup>23</sup>

As the threat of secession materialized in late 1860, the *Pilot* hoped to stave off war. Prior to news arriving of South Carolina’s decision, the *Pilot* exclaimed “Our Proclamation for 1861! The Union-it must be preserved! The *Pilot* knows no North, no South.” Alluding to the fact that only Vermont, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Michigan had passed unconstitutional laws against fugitive slaves, the paper stated that it would be “ridiculous as well as criminal for the South to secede from the Union because Vermont, to which no slave ever escapes, should omit to repeal her personal liberty bill.” When news of South Carolina’s secession, the *Pilot* somberly reported the news to its readers: “It is with painful emotions that we are called upon to state to the Union-supporting readers of *The Pilot* that we cannot in this issue of our journal announce any improvement in the condition of our country, in relation to disunion.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, May 18, 1861.

<sup>24</sup> *Pilot*, December 22, 1860; December 29, 1860.

Far from a sweeping indictment of the South, the *Pilot* also held the North responsible for secession. The *Pilot* suggested that the United States government needed to protect the Constitution against the illegal secession, stating “the government may be constrained to resort to arms, or the idea of republican government, as established by the United States Constitution, will be despised by civilized nations.” Two weeks later, the paper exclaimed that “In fact, secession is a northern invention...the first secession speech ever made in Congress was by Josiah Quincy of Boston.” Therefore, the *Pilot* did not exclusively blame the Southern states for their decision to secede from the Union, but it pinned responsibility to quash the rebellion to the American government and its citizens. After war broke out at Fort Sumter, the *Pilot* blasted the Republican Party, exclaiming that the “fearful responsibility rests upon those who have brought the country to its present condition.”<sup>25</sup>

The *Pilot* also blamed fanaticism for the war but assigned more blame to the South. In doing so, the *Pilot* stated that the abolitionists “are guilty – deeply guilty; but secession is a principle which is older than abolitionism; and it has surpassed it in crime by the assumption of arms.” The *Pilot* claimed that the South had erred in fighting the war, despite the fact that abolitionists had provoked them. Nevertheless, the mass of the people of the North are not Abolitionists; the mass of them are truly patriotic, and against them, either mentally or physically, the inhabitants of the South were never a match. The mistake of the South is the greatest in history.” While abolitionists were “deeply guilty,” secession “surpassed it in crime by the assumption of arms.” The Civil War had been caused by “the aristocratic wickedness of the South.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Pilot*, February 2, 1861; February 16, 1861; April 20, 1861.

<sup>26</sup> *Pilot*, September 26, 1863; May 31, 1862; August 30, 1862.

### **The *Trent* Affair and the Irish Sense of Union**

Irish leaders consistently identified anything and anything resembling English political values or culture as being un-American, and they insisted throughout the war that the United States should stand up to the British. Many hoped for a war between the two countries. The Irish identified the British as anti-Union co-conspirators. The anti-English hostilities encompassed within the Irish sensibility incensed their passions for the Union. The English had persecuted the Irish for a long time, and the British government's sympathy for a rebellion against the Union and Constitution further entrenched Irish support for the defense and preservation of that Union and Constitution. The *Trent* Affair excited these passions as did no other event during the war.

Shortly after the Union deserted Fort Sumter in April 1861, the Confederacy sent diplomatic agents to Europe to seek formal recognition of the Confederacy. The diplomats chosen turned out to be largely incompetent, and by the fall of 1861, the Confederate government realized its mistake and the prospect of diplomatic recognition from the European powers would mean to their objectives. Therefore, the Confederacy selected James M. Mason of Virginia, an author of the Fugitive Slave Act, to travel to Great Britain in search of recognition. John Slidell of Louisiana, the infamous proponent of reopening the African slave trade, was designated to voyage to France where he would attempt to secure French recognition. The two Confederate agents arrived in the neutral port of Havana on October 17, 1861. There they boarded the British mail carrier the *Trent*, which planned to take them to St. Thomas, where they would board a ship headed to England. Just one day out of Havana, on November 8, Captain Charles Wilkes of the

*USS San Jacinto* spotted the *Trent*, which he had correctly heard contained Mason and Slidell. Without receiving any prior instructions from military or government officials, Wilkes stopped the *Trent*, boarded the vessel, and arrested Mason and Slidell. Captain Wilkes violated English neutrality with his actions. Wilkes had the right to search the ship for war contraband, but arresting the two diplomats without granting them judicial process clearly constituted a legal violation. Not only was it doubtful that any prize court would have deemed two human beings “war contraband,” but Wilkes had also insulted British naval pride.<sup>27</sup>

Lord John Russell, the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Prime Minister Palmerston drafted an ultimatum demanding the release of the prisoners and an apology from the American government. U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and President Abraham Lincoln issued a statement acknowledging that Mason and Slidell had been entitled to the judicial process and released the two diplomats, satisfying British demands while saving face with an American public hostile to the meddling English. The *Trent* Affair brought the two countries as close to war as they were to get during the Civil War, and it reinforced the anti-English sensibility in the Irish-American press. They used the *Trent* Affair to make a statement about their Americanism by attacking the British as un-American. Lincoln’s adept handling of the crisis averted war with Britain and reinforced the weakness of Confederate diplomacy. Furthermore, it left the American president and the Union itself with the respect, confidence and esteem that came from mollifying the domestic backlash while backing the British down.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart Leiberger, “Lincoln’s ‘White Elephants’: The Trent Affair,” *Lincoln Herald* 84, no. 2(1982): 84-86.

<sup>28</sup> Leiberger, “Lincoln’s White Elephants, 91; Phillip E. Myers, *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2008), 86-88. Myers’s

The Mason and Slidell story first appeared in the *Pilot* on December 7, 1861. The paper stated that “The privateers constitute the war marine of the rebel States, and as we treat their captured soldiers as prisoners of war we do not see any substantial reason for treating their captured sailors otherwise.” Not only did the *Pilot* consider these men prisoners of war, but as word of the British response on the issue swirled, the paper displayed little restraint when referring to the possibility of war with the English. In an article entitled “The Capture of Mason and Slidell,” the *Pilot* taunted the British, claiming that “If the British provoke a war so much the worse for themselves. It is time for them to know that American soldiers have always thrashed them.” Referring to British anger two weeks later, the paper jeered “Let it blaze away! The seizure of the *Trent* was not needed to give the conviction that England is hostile to the republic.” The same issue indicated the level of Irish-American interest in the English situation by stating that “Our disturbed relations with England continue to occupy the public mind almost to the exclusion of our civil war.”<sup>29</sup>

As the New Year passed, anti-English sentiment did not. The *Pilot* mandated an Irish call to arms against the British, stating “And here, in this country, let every breathing Irishman be ready to arm against England for the stars and the stripes. Long, long may they wave!” Referring to their perceived notion that other American newspapers were backing down in regard to their position on Mason and Slidell, as many

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revisionist interpretation downplayed the *Trent* Affair and other diplomatic issues in the overall scope of the war. He argued that the Anglo-American rapprochement in the antebellum era prevented these spats from spiraling out of control and actually endangering a war between the two countries. For a more narrowly-focused study, both temporally (the book chiefly covers the period from secession to the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation) and methodologically (relying mostly on official state documents), Howard Jones argued that Britain actually exercised great restraint in avoiding war and credited certain officials (the British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, and Secretary for War George Cornwall Lewis) for avoiding intervention – see Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> *Pilot*, December 7, 1861; December 14, 1861; December 28, 1861.

of them seemed disposed to let them go free, the *Pilot* stated “This backing and filling of the subject is unfortunate, as it encourages the arrogance of John Bull.” After the two diplomats were reported to have been released, the *Pilot* condemned the decision, claiming that the United States government “has overrated the power of the foreign enemy and underrated the resources and spirit of the United States to resist that enemy. England could not have done us any serious harm, while we could have drummed her out of Canada with a Western avalanche.” The *Trent* Affair imposed a further sense of distrust with regard to the British. As stated in the *Pilot*, “All remember the English abuse of our country on the ground of slavery...the war now enlists the sympathies of the English for the rebellious slave states...the truth is, the English nation wants to crush us.”<sup>30</sup> These articles illustrated the anti-English sensibility, labeling the English as co-conspirators against the Union.

The *Irish-American* continued with its pro-War, anti-British sensibilities as the *Trent* Affair climaxed. Lashing out against English neutrality in November 1861, the *Irish-American* laid out its stance on whether the prisoners should be released. It stated “We sincerely hope...that they will hold fast to Messrs. [sic] Slidell and Mason, and that they will let the English government know that they hold at their proper value their hypocritical pretences of neutrality.” Two weeks later, the prospect of war with England showed up directly in the text of the *Irish-American*. “If a war between England and the United States should occur,” stated the paper, then “not only could an Irish Brigade be formed to meet the exigency, but an Irish Army, and that nothing would please them better than to be landed on the other side of the Atlantic instead of the other side of the Potomac.” Soon after, the paper congratulated Captain Wilkes for “unmasking the

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<sup>30</sup> *Pilot*, January 4, 1862; January 11, 1862; January 25, 1862.

treachery of England.” Upon the surrender of Mason and Slidell, the *Irish-American* announced that the Irish were disappointed by the anticlimactic end to the crisis. In an article entitled “The Prospect of War with England,” in which it stated “We have received a large number of communications, since the announcement of the intended surrender of Mason and Slidell, all expressing disappointment at what the writers regard as an untoward conclusion of the hopes excited by the prospect of a rupture between the United States and England. We have little hesitation in confessing that we experienced a like feeling.” The paper printed many letters from Irish-American Union troops at this time, and many of those letters indicated the hostility to the English over the Affair. One soldier’s letter stated that “With a wild and joyous feeling some of us a short time ago hailed the decisive and defiant action of Captain Wilkes.” The man expressed his disappointment with their release, echoing the sentiments of the paper itself, stating “if news had been brought to us of the surrender of the entire affairs of the nation by President Lincoln into the hands of Jefferson Davis, we could not have been more astonished and astounded, than to learn that the Confederate Commissioners were to be given up to England.” Referring to the *Trent* Affair, a soldier serving in Kentucky wrote to the *Irish-American*, stating “We are much pleased to see the Irish at home sympathize with America against...England and her ally, the devil.”<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of the *Trent* Affair, the *Record* indicated that most Irish would jump at the chance to get Britain into the fight and that “we must not apologize.” The paper

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<sup>31</sup> *Irish-American*, November 23, 1861; December 7, 1861; December 21, 1861; January 11, 1862; January 25, 1862. One Irish-American fighting motivation was training for a possible war with England. According to Irish-American soldier Thomas Francis Galwey (who served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry), Meagher even mentioned this when speaking to his Potomac Circle in the Fenian Brotherhood – see Thomas Francis Galwey, *The Valiant Hours: Narrative of “Captain Brevet,” an Irish-American in the Army of the Potomac*, ed. Colonel W.S. Nye (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Company, 1961), 183.

vaguely boasted that upwards of three or four hundred thousand Irishmen could be mustered for a fight with the English (while difficult to confirm or deny, it is likely that Irish enlistments would have increased had Britain gone to war with the United States). While there were fears that open hostilities with England may force recognition of the Southern Confederacy, the *Record* claimed that those who stated that were not taking into consideration the fact that war with England would “bring out twice the force we now have in the field.” When Mason and Slidell were released, the *Record* insisted that America’s problems with Britain had only been postponed and that the “Irish in the United states are alone more than equal to the performance of the cheerful work of putting an end to British rule on any part of this Continent” when the British made “their next demand.”<sup>32</sup>

Many Irish viewed the event with a sense of anti-English bravado. Irish-American soldier Michael Leary remarked on the futility of prospective English interference following the Affair. “From the appearance of things at present we will not only have to fight the rebels but John Bull too. Bull is kicking up a great fuss about their rebel Commissioners,” he wrote home, dismissing the possibility that Mason and Slidell would be returned. “My humble opinion is that John Bull had better not interfere in this trouble or perhaps he would get whipped worse than he did before,” Leary opined. “But perhaps, he has forgot that and would like to stick his fingers into the pie again,” and “if he does,” warned Leary, “he will surely get his fingers cut off.”<sup>33</sup>

### **The Irish and the Emancipation Proclamation**

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<sup>32</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, December 21, 1861; December 28, 1861; January 4, 1862.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Leary (9<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts) to Ellen “Nellie” Desmond, December 19, 1861; Leary to Desmond, December 21, 1861, Folder 20, Box 1, Michael Leary Letters, Burns Library, Boston College.

The Emancipation Proclamation marked the turning point in Irish-American support for “Lincoln’s war.” Hoping to swing momentum and Northern morale in his favor while re-defining Union war objectives, the president had decided to make the Civil War a war to free the slaves. Since this contradicted the very essence of what America meant to the Irish, their once firm support began to erode. With emancipation, the Irish saw a behemoth Republican government overstepping the bounds of its power to impose its personal taste on the masses. From this point on, the war became a war for an America that the Irish had no longing for. The Emancipation Proclamation was the culmination of the abolitionist assault on American values. It perverted the war effort and overstepped the constitutional bounds of the American government. Democrats pronounced it tyrannous and capitalized on that rallying cry in the upcoming midterm elections.<sup>34</sup>

Traditionally, the American Irish have been labeled as staunch Southern sympathizers during the sectional conflict and American Civil War, due in large part to their vitriolic opposition to the abolitionist agenda. Historians have long weighed and debated the origins and nature of Irish repugnance for African Americans as being the product of racism, economic uncertainty or a combination of both. For the purposes of this study, however, what the Irish set out as their reasoning is more important than their true feelings on the matter. Most Irish framed their opposition to abolitionism in constitutional terms; they opposed abolition by claiming it was unconstitutional. Since the Irish were claiming that the American Constitution was the last best hope on Earth and opposed abolition to save the Constitution, the Irish had situated themselves on the

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<sup>34</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 560-562.

most American, most Constitutional side of the debate. They made opposition to abolition a pillar of their Americanism; they cast the abolitionists as their un-American antagonists.<sup>35</sup>

The *Pilot* consistently contended that its politics was the most American of political philosophies. It vehemently opposed abolitionism as a key component of Americanism. The paper rejected the comparison of Irish servility to Britain with American negro slavery; while it was tyranny in Ireland from a foreign political entity, it was merely the natural order of things in America. Abolitionism and even the anti-slavery arguments of Irish Liberator Daniel O’Connell were seen as revolutionary lawlessness at odds with the American Constitution; they framed the opposition of abolition as a pillar of American patriotism. When abolitionists broke American laws, for example, the *Pilot* would pounce on their stories to try and demonstrate that Irish-American, Democratic principles were more American than were nativist principles. Not

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 27. The Irish in Ireland were split on the abolition issue along political lines (as opposed to geographic lines like their American brethren). The more conservative Unionist contingent were pro-abolitionist (at least superficially), while the nationalists were ardently opposed to abolition and labeled English support of abolitionism as hypocritical. Generally speaking, this divide was consistent with Irish public opinion on the war itself. Protestants and Unionists generally were hostile to America and thus supported the South, along with moderate nationalists. Those radical nationalists seeking a complete break with Britain identified with the American cause of 1776 and tended to support the North. Of course, British sympathies (perceived and real) with the Confederacy also played into this. Taken as a whole, the vast majority of the Irish opposed the Northern prosecution of the war. To understand the complexities of Irish views on the Civil War, which were further complicated by class, religion, and other factors, see Joseph M. Herndon, Jr., *Celts, Catholics, and Copperheads: Ireland Views the American Civil War* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1968), 8, 69, 108. Overall, Irish public opinion was with the Confederacy, however. This did not sit well with Meagher, who claimed that demagogues perverted his views on the American war in the Irish press – see Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy*, 413. Britain identified with the South’s aristocratic society and actually feared undergoing a process of “Americanization” themselves. They despised the prototypical Yankee and viewed the egalitarian institutions in the United States as akin to anarchy – see Hugh Dubrulle, ““We Are Threatened with...Anarchy and Ruin”: Fear of Americanization and the Emergence of Anglo-Saxon Confederacy in England during the American Civil War,” *Albion* 33, no. 4(Winter 2002): 583-613. For a more nuanced discussion of the differences in British public opinion (particularly across classes), see R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). For a discussion of how the war was reported in Great Britain, see Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2000).

one Irishman had helped the pro-British traitor John Brown, for example, and the Irish did not vote for Lincoln, the representative of the “John Brown clique” in the North. The *Pilot* stated that voters in the North had a duty to take the Union back from anti-American Abolitionists. The paper quoted William Lloyd Garrison in summarizing the platform of the Abolitionists, thus brandishing them as disunionist and un-American: “THIS UNION IS A LIE! THE AMERICAN UNION IS AN IMPOSITION, A COVENANT WITH DEATH AND AN AGREEMENT WITH HELL! I AM FOR ITS OVERTHROW!”<sup>36</sup>

While John Brown was a martyr for the anti-slavery cause, he was also a lightning rod for many Southerners wishing to use him as a propaganda tool. Equating not just all abolitionists with John Brown but all Northerners, secessionists used fears of a massive slave revolt in promoting their cause. Many Northern Democrats, including the Irish, were also particularly alarmed. His competing reputations as a treasonous madman or a reincarnated Moses were formed before his attempt to seize the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry and incite a slave revolt. John Brown symbolized the perceived fanaticism of abolitionists and the Republican Party. His actions horrified his opponents while also providing them with ammunition to scare constituents. Everyone had an opinion, and the Civil War-era Irish claimed Brown was a typical abolitionist and political extremist bent on unconstitutionally freeing blacks in the same vein as other Puritan nativists.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mulcrone, “The Famine Irish and the Irish-American Press,” 61; Walsh, “The Boston Pilot Reports the Civil War,” 6-7; *Pilot*, October 10, 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Ironically, these competing reputations have hampered the historiography on John Brown. For a thorough discussion of these dichotomies, myths, and exaggerations of John Brown, along with an attempt to humbly place him in the American historical narrative, see Evan Carton, *Patriotic Treason: John Brown and the Soul of America* (New York: Free Press, 2006). For a cultural biography of Brown which, in spite of its far-reaching subtitle, places Brown’s violent acts within the context of the time he lived (adding perspective for those quick to label him as insane or deranged), see David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York:

The Irish openly boasted of their status as the truest Americans, in contrast to their political opponents. The *Pilot* called the abolitionists “Traitors to the Constitution,” noting that “Between secession and abolitionism, the FUNDAMENTAL LAW of the country has no refuge.” The *Pilot* pointed out that “The great speech of Daniel Webster in reply to Mr. Calhoun, that the Constitution was not a compact, may be applied in every sentence it contains to the principle of the Abolitionists, that the same document was a league with hell.” As the *Pilot* stated in May 1862, “It is plain that whatever increases disunion, or the anti-UNION sentiment, is high treason.” The *Freeman’s Journal* carefully distinguished between “the real people of the South,” who were not “represented when factionists and disunionists profess to speak for them.” These Unionist Southerners were “true Americans” who “desire their country united.” Jefferson Davis was “the dangerous head of an unpatriotic faction at the South,” but the “Free Soilers of the North had likewise been taught that their views were too narrow for so great a country.” As opposed to un-American extremists on either side, Unionists both North and South were viewed as the real Americans. “The real people of the South,” whose “true sentiments are not represented when factionists and disunionists profess to speak for them,” were “true Americans.” Unionists on each side qualified as “true Americans.” The concept of Union itself was carefully distinguished from that of unity. “Union is not *unity* – not, in political parlance, *Unitarianism*,” for Unitarianism meant the trampling of individual rights and liberties, such as the “abolition revolutionists” desired. Rather, Union meant liberty, “because the elements of which it is constituted have the

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Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). For an older but valuable biography of John Brown that dismisses those who have discounted Brown as insane, see Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

power of will and of resistance.”<sup>38</sup> These papers were unfavorably contrasting the majoritarian Unionism of the Republican war effort with the individualistic Unionism the Irish preferred.

The announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation completely changed the *Record*'s view of the war effort. After begrudgingly praising Lincoln for his heretofore conservative war policy, the paper claimed that the new policy had “produced a feeling of dismay and bewilderment among the conservative and patriotic masses.” It claimed that the “bloody horrors of the St. Domingo massacres were mere child’s play” and that the freed slaves should be relocated to New England to live amongst the “fanatics and social and political disorganizers” who “have done so much to bring this ruin and misery on the country.” As the *Irish-American* stated back in December 1861, “the first inkling of a design to convert this war into a mere Abolition crusade, not for the restoration of our glorious Union, but for the destruction of one portion of it, will cause the withdrawal of the public confidence.” By the end of 1862, the *Record* claimed that “history has never recorded a more lamentable failure” than Lincoln’s management of the war. Unionism was even cited as the reason for opposing abolition.<sup>39</sup>

Irish-American papers had initially given tepid support to Lincoln, but this was contingent upon his stated conservative war aims of preserving the Union; any hint of emancipation drew red flags from the Irish press. Blasting John C. Fremont’s 1861 emancipation proclamation in Missouri (it nearly lost the state for the Union), the *Record* explained how it had “regretted the precipitate and rash haste with which the South plunged into the conflict” but also had “always sympathized with the Southern people,

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<sup>38</sup> *Pilot*, November 23, 1861; May 3, 1862; *Freeman’s Journal*, May 19, 1860; June 23, 1860; May 19, 1860; March 28, 1863.

<sup>39</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, October 4, 1862; December 28, 1862; *Irish-American*, December 14, 1861.

and believed that their peculiar institution had been the subject of unjustifiable and unwarrantable interference on the part of those who called themselves the friend of the slave, but who are in reality his worst enemies.” The *Record* also lauded the decision of the president for his rejection of War Secretary Simon Cameron’s suggestion that slaves of secessionists be freed. If Lincoln had agreed, it would “inevitably tend to widen the breach already existing between the North and South.”<sup>40</sup>

In January 1862, the *Metropolitan Record* reiterated its support of the conservative policy of Lincoln to that point in the war, but it ominously warned readers that the Abolitionist wing of his party was gaining strength and needed to be reckoned with. For if the abolitionists succeeded in convincing Lincoln to abolish slavery, those “enemies of the Union” would have turned the war effort from one for Union into a “crusade against the peculiar institution of the Southern States, whose rights are guaranteed by the Constitution.” If successful, then it would be a sadder day for the country than the day Fort Sumter was fired upon and could plunge the country into “worse horrors than those which attended the Reign of Terror in France.” So long as Lincoln adhered to the conservative war policy for the Union, it was a “defeat to both abolitionists and secessionists,” who had caused the war to begin with. The *Record* even called for a conservative proclamation of war aims from Lincoln, arguing that a majority of the citizens in both sections would recognize Southern rights and vote in an “overwhelming majority” for the restoration of the union.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the fact that he branded the Lincoln administration as “incompetent” and blamed “fanatical nigar [sic] worshippers” for standing in the way of peace, Peter Welsh

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<sup>40</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, November 23, 1861; December 28, 1861.

<sup>41</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, January 18, 1862; January 25, 1862; February 22, 1862.

constantly referenced the need for the union to survive at all costs. Echoing the early-war sentiments of President Lincoln, Welsh indicated in early 1863 that he cared little what happened to the institution of slavery so long as the Union remained intact. Welsh noted that there was “dissatisfaction and loud denunciation of the course of the executive in the army with the course pursued in the slavery question.” For Welsh, however, “if slavery is in the way of a proper administration of the laws and the integrity and perpetuity [sic] of this nation then I say away with both slaves and slavery.”<sup>42</sup> Mirroring Lincoln’s Unionist rhetoric from early in the war, Welsh reveals how Unionism trumped all other considerations for the American Irish.

For Irish Democrats, abolitionism lay outside the purview of the federal government’s jurisdiction under their narrow view of federal Constitutional authority. O’Gorman explained how treasonous Abolitionism threatened the Constitution and the Republic; they were “menaced with destruction by the factious abuse of arbitrary powers never delegated by the people to even their most trusted representatives.” Irish newspapers attacked abolitionism as an un-American and English “imported” creation. “Adopted in the spirit of servile colonialism,” the *Freeman’s Journal* labeled abolitionism as “cousin-german to that vile and detestable Americanism which tried to betray Decatur and his crew – as he reported to the Government – and hung out blue-light signals to the enemy at New London.”<sup>43</sup>

The *Herald* did not necessarily promote slavery’s existence per se, even if it did not advocate for its abolition. Despite supporting the “constitutional rights of Southern States” to secede, this did not commit the *Herald* to “unhesitating support of their social

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<sup>42</sup> Welsh to his wife on February 8, 1863 in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 70; Welsh to his wife on February 3, 1863 in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> *Irish-American*, October 18, 1862; *Freeman’s Journal*, August 3, 1859.

institutions.” To the Irish, imperial despots were a more evil brand of slaveholder. Never missing a chance to insult the Old World, the editorial denigrated “certain European Catholics, who rejoice in upholding imperial despotism” while they claim to be “greatly scandalized by negro slavery in this country.” The *Herald* compared secession to the actions of the American colonies during the American Revolution. Finding “our modern *republicans*...in such close alliance, in principle and contemplated action, with the servile adherents of the tyrant George the Third,” the *Herald* argued that colonial secessionists had paved the way for Southern secession through the “very principles of our own Declaration of Independence, and the precise reservations of our own Constitution.” The American colonists had been Whigs and secessionists who had risen up against a tyrannical power; the parallels with 1861 were easy to make.<sup>44</sup>

The *Herald* printed famous letters of famous Irish nationalist and slavery opponent Daniel O’Connell, but it rejected the notion that that meant the paper’s editors qualified as abolitionists. The *Herald* recognized that there were differences between being an anti-slavery and an abolitionist, and left no doubts where they stood on abolitionists, whose ideas embodied in the Emancipation Proclamation “mean murder, arson, robbery, rape, and in short, all that it is shocking even to contemplate.” Demonstrating Irish-American views on emancipation’s threats to America, the *Herald* stated declared “slavery is an evil,” but “is it a greater evil than the overthrow of the Constitution and the Union?” The *Herald* resented abolitionists, but it admitted that slavery was the indirect cause of the war itself and its death would eliminate the sectional

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<sup>44</sup> *Catholic Herald*, January 19, 1861; February 2, 1861.

problems: “The death of slavery destroys abolitionism and secession – the two causes of the rebellion.”<sup>45</sup>

The *Herald* primarily blamed Northern fanaticism primarily for the sectional crisis however. In reference to those who railed against the South for its behavior, the *Herald* noted, “they will have to admit that the first assaults upon the integrity of the Union were made by the ignorant and fanatical, and dishonest political traders of the north.” These dishonest political traders had led the ignorant masses into “the toils of the fanatics, and the artful and ambitious demagogues stepped in and made tools of both the ignorant and the fanatical, and the result of the unprincipled combination is before the world, in the dissolution of the most peaceful and prosperous Union of Republics the sun has ever shone upon.” The *Herald* blamed “Negrophilists” for starting the Civil War by stirring up blacks on Southern plantations by “sending hundreds of fire-brand scoundrels to the Southern plantations” all the while they “fanaticized a large portion of the Northern citizens with animosity to the Southern nature.” The *Herald* faulted abolitionists at least in part for secession, but it also noted that the South had “reigned almost absolutely in the management of the public affairs.” The paper held that “the National Government *never* violated a single Southern right.”<sup>46</sup> Again, Northern aggression provoked the South, but the Irish thought the Southern people, under the influence of demagogues and extremists, had overreacted.

The Emancipation Proclamation served to unite the Southern people as they had heretofore never been, according to the *Record*, which predicted that the Union would be restored as it had been before the war, with Southern slavery rights intact. The country

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<sup>45</sup> *Catholic Herald*, October 7, 1863; November 25, 1863; April 2, 1864.

<sup>46</sup> *Catholic Herald*, March 30, 1861; December 2, 1863; December 16, 1863; February 6, 1864.

had lapsed into a Republican despotism on par with the French directory under Robespierre and the worst English atrocities in Ireland. Since the Irish soldier had “fought not so much against the South as for the restoration of the Union,” the *Record* explicated that the soldiers had “been betrayed by the Administration in its perversion of this war from the legitimate object for which it was commenced.”<sup>47</sup>

The *Record* pronounced that the troops had been led into battle under false pretenses when the war effort was defined as “for the Union.” No one would have gone to war if “instead of the Stars and Stripes, the word “ABOLITIONISM” was inscribed upon their banners.” Instead, they would have allowed William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and the others to fight their own battles. By July 25, 1863, the *Record* had come to believe that the only way that the “integrity of the Republic” could be restored was to repeal emancipation and conscription and then implement the Crittenden Compromise to bring the Southern states back into the Union on equal footing. By January of 1864, the paper was running articles comparing the plights of Ireland and the American South, “two countries” battling for the right of self-government against “a power that has ignored and set at defiance the supreme law from which, in the first place, it derived its authority.” The Irish soldiers and other “brave men who went forth to fight *for the Union* have been sacrificed to the fell spirit of Abolitionism.” The *Freeman’s Journal* claimed that the Irish were fighting for different reasons from the abolitionist element in the North. As they “are *for Union*...truly and fervently,” they were fighting “for the *love* of the South. We mean to fight the South till it falls in love with us, and seeks a *union*.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, January 10, 1863; January 31, 1863; February 14, 1863.

<sup>48</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, May 23, 1863; July 25, 1863; January 2, 1864; April 25, 1863; *Freeman’s Journal*, November 29, 1862.

The *Freeman's Journal* increasingly blamed Northern fanatics as the war progressed. Accordingly, “when they elected Abraham Lincoln in November, 1860, to carry out what John Brown tried in October, 1859, the Southern States had full warning given them of the purpose and bent of their treacherous federates at the North. The ‘first gun’ was not at Sumpter! [sic]” The true cause of the war had been an overbearing, holier-than-thou Northern fanaticism: “We have fallen victims to an infamous usurpation of Puritanic [sic] despotism, that has piled mountains of American soldiers on fields deluged with blood.” The old Democratic hope of “a *Constitutional Union* of all American States” was giving way to the “almost inevitable chaos of anarchy.”<sup>49</sup>

*Pilot* editor Patrick Donahoe pointed out that not one in a hundred Irish-American soldiers had volunteered for the Union Army to free the slaves. A Boston man calling himself “McNelvin” wrote to the *Irish-American* in August 1864 advocating “peace and the restoration of the Constitution, without Father Abraham’s emancipation plank.” The Irish-American soldiers of the 90<sup>th</sup> Illinois had mixed feelings regarding the Emancipation Proclamation. Some of them, such as Sergeant Charles Woollett, worried that emancipation was “causing deep dissatisfaction, which, I fear, will bear bitter fruits.” Others, such as Captain Patrick Flynn, chose to emphasize the loyalty and duty of him and the other Irish-American soldiers. “Even if I did differ with the President,” he stated, “I will faithfully endeavor to do my duty to my country fulfilling every obligation I owe as an officer and a soldier. Every Irish-American soldier in the Army is animated by this thoroughly order-loving, law-abiding spirit.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, April 9, 1864; May 21, 1864.

<sup>50</sup> Ofele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 129; *Irish-American*, August 13, 1864; James B. Swan, *Chicago's Irish Legion: the 90<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteers in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 60. Seventy percent of the soldiers in the 90<sup>th</sup> Illinois were born in Ireland, while seventeen percent

The *Pilot* found the Emancipation Proclamation to be a well-intentioned yet misguided attempt to end the war. The *Pilot* predicted that it would increase the South's hatred of the North by a million times; thus, "the Act only invigorates the South to renewed energy." While Lincoln was "full of genuine patriotism," the Emancipation Proclamation would work against the country. The only hope was to return to the Democratic principles that had previously held the nation together. When the Democrats were in power, so were the citizens of the nation; when they fell out of power, the nation fell apart. And "were it in power, there would be no fanaticism in the public counsels,- no questionable proclamations would be issued." The *Pilot* felt that abolition would simply make the Unionist plight worse. "It would be impossible to bring the South back into the Union in such a way – the suppression of abolitionism is necessary to save the nation," argued the paper. The abolitionists needed to be removed from office, as it was only the "complete overthrow of themselves and their principles that can save" the Union."<sup>51</sup> Thus, in the eyes of the *Pilot*, the Emancipation Proclamation failed both ideologically and pragmatically.

Lamenting what it perceived to be an almost unconditional surrender doctrine levied upon the South, the *Pilot* stated "The hatred of the South to the North has been the source of this rebellion, but that hatred becomes now a million of times increased." To further demonstrate what the paper saw as the unbending will of the South, it exclaimed "The Confederate disposition surpasses Confederate resources in importance and that disposition is now turned away from us forever." While the prevalence of reports on

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were from Irish stock but American-born. It was the lone Irish unit that participated in Sherman's "march to the sea." According to Swan, Illinois Irishmen were difficult to homogenize, partially because they lacked access to parochial newspapers that the Irish had in the northeast – see Swan, 3, 15.

<sup>51</sup> *Pilot*, October 4, 1862; December 13, 1862.

individual regiments, particularly the Irish regiments, and war updates from the battlefields continued, the opinion articles further politicized the thematic nature of the newspaper. The influence of the recently issued Emancipation Proclamation is quite evident. On October 18, 1862, the *Pilot* blasted Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, stating “his leading idea, that peace with the South can only be attained by declaring the slaves in the rebel states free: in fact, by changing the Constitution in a mode entirely unwarranted.” The paper painted Lincoln as an incompetent party hack, stating “Abraham Lincoln is in too many instances, the flexible tool of an unscrupulous party. But he should remember his oath of office, and be untrammelled by anything save the CONSTITUTION. That is now the worst danger, and as it owes most of that danger to the havoc of war administered by the Know-Nothings, Abolitionists, and Republicans.”<sup>52</sup>

The *Irish-American* launched an all-out attack on the Republicans in Congress and the Lincoln administration. In an article entitled “Why the Republican Party Cannot Save the Country,” the paper attacked the slow progress of the war, blaming it specifically on “a fanatical majority in Congress, who make war on Union men of the South and strengthen the hands of the Secessionists by words...which enable them to keep alive the flames of the Civil War.” Blasting the lack of substance inherent in the Emancipation Proclamation, the *Irish-American* stated, “The President will issue of a proclamation of immediate and universal emancipation! Against whom is this to be directed? Not against those in rebellion...it can only be applied to those who have been true to our union and our flag.” While the Emancipation Proclamation was actually directed exclusively against the states in rebellion, the paper continued to level criticisms against the Republican Party for a variety of indiscretions. Claiming that “they

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<sup>52</sup> *Pilot*, October 4, 1862; October 18, 1862.

[Republicans] desire no Union and no Constitution that will not be in every way subservient to their fanatical abolition ideas.” The paper also stated that “It would be well if Republicans had done their duty in this war as well as Irishmen, both as it regards enlisting and fighting.”<sup>53</sup>

### **The New York City Draft Riots and Irish Unionism**

After the change in Union war objectives with the Emancipation Proclamation, the Conscription Act further marginalized the Irish from the Republican war effort. They not only objected to the unconstitutional (as they saw it) power grab by the Lincoln administration in implementing a national draft, but also to the commutation fee that discriminated against poor citizens (and violated their view of American citizenship). While the Irish are largely remembered as the firebrand instigators of the New York City draft riots, many Irish disassociated themselves from the rioters and helped put down the rebellion. While the Irish certainly led the draft riots in New York City in July 1863, many Irish firemen had lost their lives trying to get the situation under control. The majority of Irish workers in the sixth and fourteenth wards of New York City had refrained from participating in any way.<sup>54</sup> In an attempt to avoid appearing traitorous, the Irish largely downplayed their role in the riots.

The New York City draft riots have long been remembered as an Irish Catholic outpouring of Copperhead class antagonism and racism. While each of these grievances greatly colored the riots themselves, the deeper origins lay situated within the context of a highly-politicized mid-nineteenth century urban culture. In part, the New York City draft

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<sup>53</sup> *Irish-American*, September 27, 1862; October 11, 1862.

<sup>54</sup> Ofele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 135.

riots illustrated the reservoir of resentment toward Republican rule that had been rising since the previous decade. At some level, this federal reach into the municipal level triggered anger over who was to rule both the country and the city of New York. The Irish allied with Tammany Hall machinery against Republicans, who held little appeal within the working-class circles of New York City. While Irish Catholics certainly participated as members of the working class, they did not necessarily instigate or dominate the riots. Upper-class division opened the door to the riots through a vacuum of authority and helped further cement ties between working classes and Tammany Hall. Lincoln's draft and Emancipation Proclamation embodied the revolutionary transition of authority from the local to the national level, which alarmed and angered those of the Jeffersonian persuasion.<sup>55</sup>

Between 1863 and 1865, 776,829 men were conscripted in four drafts. A total of 46,347 of these men, or just under six percent, actually served in the Union Army. Some hired substitutes, some claimed exemptions due to physical disabilities, some paid the \$300 commutation fee, and over 160,000 failed to report to the draft board, thus becoming illegal draft evaders. Using congressional districts as case studies, and analyzing their demographic, economic, and political profiles, Peter Levine determined to a large extent that the profile of those who evaded the draft "loosely fits" the stereotype of the Northern draft dodger as Catholic, Copperhead, and immigrant. According to Levine, however, these Catholic Copperheads did not consider their draft resistance

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<sup>55</sup> Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6; see also James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991); Barnett Schecter, *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America* (New York: Walker & Company, 2005); Toby Joyce, "The New York City Draft Riots of 1863: An Irish Civil War?" *History Ireland* 11, no. 2(Summer 2003): 22-27.

unpatriotic or treasonous. Rather, it was the natural outgrowth of their disagreement with Republican policy makers over America's future. In contrast to the Republican predilection of a modernizing culture that celebrated temperance and the authority of Protestant elites, one can easily deduce the reasons for Irish Catholic resentment of the draft, especially when considering their lower class status and European heritage. They were being drafted to fight in a war for an America they no longer identified with; they had become mercenaries in their own country. The Democrats represented traditionalist communalism while the Republicans championed a modernism characterized by centralized nationalism and industrial capitalism.<sup>56</sup>

The *Pilot* discussed the new draft order from President Lincoln in May 1863, explaining to readers why the order was necessary: "The purpose of the order is to inflict punishment on the unnaturalized Irish because enlistments fell off on account of the absurd proclamation to emancipate the slaves in the revolted states." Forcing a draft upon the Irish was met with such contempt because of the enthusiasm with which they

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<sup>56</sup> Peter Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Journal of American History* 67 (March 1981): 816-817, 825, 831-833. Over the duration of the Civil War, the Union encouraged Irish emigration in order to replace workers and soldiers. With crop failures, crime, and debt mounting in Ireland in the early 1860s, statistics have shown that emigration to the United States did indeed increase. Seward dispatched notices to American consuls asking them to promote the opportunity inherent in the United States, although they were obviously unable to overtly recruit Irishmen as soldiers – see Charles P. Cullop, "An Unequal Duel: Union Recruiting in Ireland, 1863-1864," *Civil War History* 13(1967): 101-104. Top Confederate officials, including Judah P. Benjamin, saw this recruiting as paramount to Union success in the war. Confederate Commissioner A. Dudley Mann was convinced that the Union's superior numbers owed to its overseas "immigration" efforts. He sent his own servant in to inquire as to how he could join the Union Army, and the man was told to sign a contract to be a laborer in the United States and to then join the Army upon his arrival there – see Robert L. Peterson and John A. Hudson, "Foreign recruitment for Union Forces," *Civil War History* 7(1961): 178-184. Irish in Dublin actually inundated the American consul with requests to join the Union Army in exchange for passage to the United States, but the Irish opposed fundamentally opposed the concept of forced conscription – see Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949), 172-173. As early as 1862, rumors that federal agents were tricking Irishmen overseas into the Union Army abounded, much to the distaste of the pro-South majority in Ireland – see Lonnn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy*, 412-413. Stories of bounty jumpers stealing parts of bounties from Europeans they signed up to fight in the war abounded and contributed to immigrant unrest in cities like Boston – see Thomas H. O'Connor, *Civil War Boston*, 186-187.

had originally called to arms to defend the Union. Worsened by skyrocketing casualty rates suffered by the Irish Brigade, Irish-American suspicions grew that their troops were considered expendable by Union political and military leaders. After volunteering and being slaughtered in the field, Secretary of War Stanton refused to allow Meagher to replenish the Irish Brigade, so a draft seemed particularly outlandish. In reporting Meagher's resignation, the *Pilot* stated that he had resigned "what was known as the Irish Brigade." The government seemed hell-bent on forcing the Irish to fight while discrediting the service of the Irish Brigade. A May 1863 *Pilot* editorial designated "General Meagher's Irish Brigade" provided a scornful summation of Irish resentment regarding these particular issues. Referring to the first and second calls for troops, the author pointed out that the Irish had "quintupled their just proportion" in the ranks of the Union Army. Probing further, however, the author asked "But is the Irish spirit still the same? Ah, no! No! No! It is impossible for it to be." To further demonstrate the Irish sensibility, the article pointed out that "We are an immigrant race; we did not cause this war – vast numbers of our people have perished in it...The true discourager of enlistments is the Conscription bill. But the Irish spirit for the war is dead! Absolutely dead!"<sup>57</sup>

The *Irish-American*, so instrumental in launching the New York regiments in the Irish Brigade by advertising for them in April and May 1861, had become increasingly perturbed by its perception of the treatment of the Irish Brigade as well. A June 1863 editorial appropriately summed up the mood of the paper when it stated that "If the three New York regiments of the Irish Brigade are not to be blotted off the army list, they should be retired from the front and allowed to recruit their wasted strength. To keep

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<sup>57</sup> *Pilot*, May 23, 1863; May 30, 1863.

them where they are now, in their reduced condition, is not merely a cruelty, it is a crime.” That same month, the *Irish-American* blasted Lincoln’s calls for troops, claiming that it was his own blunders and incompetence which had directly resulted in their continued need.<sup>58</sup> By this point in time, the enforcement of the Conscription Bill further exacerbated tensions, culminating in the New York City draft riots.

A July 1863 *Irish-American* piece on “The Draft” stated that “It should never have been tried...Let the President cast aside the crazy machinery of political cobblers, and in the name and for the enforcement of the Constitution, invoke the aid of the empire state through her chosen Chief Magistrate.” The following week, an editorialist justified the outbreak of the New York City draft riots in the *Irish-American*, stating, “Thank God, here in New York at least, the Constitution reigns supreme.”<sup>59</sup> Since strict Constitutionalism had always been the preeminent element of the Irish definition of the Union, an editorialist referencing it as a justification for the draft riots encapsulates how much the Irish had changed their views on the war over the preceding year. Defending the Constitution had been the reason they rushed off to join the Union Army two years before; now defending the Constitution was an excuse for bloody draft riots to refuse entry into that same Union Army.

Many Irish felt that they were being targeted by this unconstitutional draft and that poorer Americans were being exploited. A letter to the *Irish-American* from Rutland, Vermont complained that one in ten or one in twenty of the draft quota in his town should have been filled by Irishmen but that over half of the 216 chosen were Irish. Many Irish also opposed the Conscription Act due to its infamous \$300 commutation fee.

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<sup>58</sup> *Irish-American*, June 13, 1863; June 20, 1863.

<sup>59</sup> *Irish-American*, July 18, 1863; July 25, 1863.

In keeping with the Irish-American notion of universalism, Irish-American soldier John England saw the \$300 commutation fee as indicative of Republican class warfare. He felt that in an un-American fashion, it distinguished between rich and poor Americans. England called the provision “unjust and tyrannical” and called for continued opposition to the draft until it was lifted.<sup>60</sup>

Other American Irish saw the draft in ideological terms, as an unconstitutional, un-American power grab by the federal government and the Republican Party. The *Freeman's Journal* claimed that the government had no right to compel a state to do anything, especially furnish soldiers for the war. Provost marshals, all of them appointed Republicans, were charged with the execution of the draft, and a disproportionate number of working class, Democratic Irishmen found their names on the rolls. The *Irish-American* interpreted conscription less as a pragmatic means for raising troops to put down the rebellion and more as a statement on the doctrine of States' Rights to which the framers of the law intended to deal a “death blow.” The draft “was less to obtain men to put down the rebellion than to prove their independence of the state governments.” It was a ploy to create a “military despotism,” as conscription was a states' rights issue alone, claimed the *Record*.<sup>61</sup>

By phrasing the argument against the draft in such a way, the writer implied that rioters were not rioting against serving the Union but rather rioting against “fanatical schemes of aggrandizement.” The draft was viewed as a treasonous act on par with secession itself. The *Irish-American* blasted the federal government's attempts to put

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<sup>60</sup> *Irish-American*, August 29, 1863; Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 173; Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, 200; Letter of John England, July 24, 1863, Box 3, John England Letters Collection, NYPL.

<sup>61</sup> Florence E. Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 151-152; *Irish-American*, July 18, 1863; *Metropolitan Record*, March 14, 1863.

down the treasonous rebellion of the Southern states by “adopting the same course towards the citizens of the loyal states, and disregarding the plainest constitutional guarantees of their rights.” The *Irish-American* condemned the violence against blacks and the burning of houses, claiming that those innocent people were not the ones responsible for the unconstitutional law. The New York paper, while incensed by the attacks on the Irish following the draft riots, remained committed to the war effort, though, promising that if Lincoln needed more troops, he would have them. Nevertheless, the paper still conceded that if it had been a war with England that needed troops, the draft rioters would have gladly volunteered for duty.<sup>62</sup>

Many Irish tried to distance themselves from such behavior. When Colonel Patrick R. Guiney got news of the draft riots in New York City and Boston, he blasted rioters for “making trouble in the hour of victory” and expressed his wishes that “the artillery will exempt them from the Draft forever!” Welsh’s devotion to the Union war effort never wavered. In a July 17, 1863 letter to his wife, he called the New York City draft riots “disgracefull [sic]” and stated that he hoped the authorities would “use canister freely” in order to “bring the bloody cutthroats to their censes.” Welsh thought “no conscription could be fairer than the one which is about to be enforced,” and he called the leaders of the riots “traitorous cutthroats.” After apologizing to his wife for the participation of the Irish in the riots, he embarrassingly exclaimed “God help the Irish.

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<sup>62</sup> *Irish-American*, July 18, 1863; August 15, 1863; July 25, 1863; Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish*, 158; Albon P. Man, Jr., “The Irish in New York in the Early Eighteen-Sixties,” in *Irish Historical Studies* 7, no. 26(September 1950): 88.

They are too easily led into such snares which gives their enemys [sic] an opportunity to malighn [sic] and abuse them.”<sup>63</sup>

The *Pilot* and *Irish-American* were infuriated by Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* blaming the Irish for everything that had gone wrong, and the *Catholic Herald* also tried to distance Irish Catholics from the draft rioters in New York City. The *Herald* supported the Irish in the wake of the New York City draft riots, blasting the *New York Times* for implying that the Irish were “ignorant, debased, and disloyal.” Nevertheless, the *Herald* did not call for violence and actually helped in keeping the violence from spreading to Philadelphia. In response to the “radical journals” who were blaming Irish Catholics exclusively for the riots and thus “preaching the disloyalty of Catholics, and their general enmity to republican institutions,” the *Herald* claimed that “if there were any Irishmen in the crowds, there were no more of them than of any other nationality; if there were Catholics, it was only in name, for a good Catholic is always a good citizen.”<sup>64</sup>

### **The Last Hope for Irish Unionism: the 1864 Election**

The 1864 election pitted President Lincoln against his frustrating former army commander, General George B. McClellan. For many Irish leaders, it finally provided an opportunity to stop the Republicans who had hijacked the war effort from the common man. Many Irish identified the preservation of the Union with the election of McClellan, though some of the more radical Irish papers thought he was too committed to war as

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<sup>63</sup> Colonel Patrick Guiney to his wife, July 16, 1863, in *Commanding Boston’s Irish Ninth: the Civil War Letters of Colonel Patrick R. Guiney, Ninth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*, ed. Christian G. Samito (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 203; Welsh to his wife, July 17, 1863, in Kohl (ed), *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 110; Welsh to his wife, July 22, 1863 in Kohl, *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 113; Welsh to his wife, August 2, 1863, in Kohl, *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 115.

<sup>64</sup> George, Jr., “Philadelphia’s *Catholic Herald*, 212; *Catholic Herald*, July 22, 1863.

well. In September 1864, the *Pilot* discussed the Irish political platform, ever careful to tie it to their definition of the Union. In an editorial titled “Irish Element in American Politics,” the author stated “It is none the less true, however that our Irish brethren, in very great numbers, are opposed to the re-election of Abraham Lincoln, because they desire to see the Union re-established, peace and prosperity return to bless the land once more, and the Constitution to be restored over all.” Thrilled by the nomination of McClellan as the Democratic candidate, the *Pilot* exclaimed that “The nomination of George B. McClellan, by the Chicago Convention, is the deathknell [sic] to the abolition party.” The Irish equated re-election with Southern victory over the Union. The *Pilot* summed up McClellan’s position as “the Union and Constitution, and submission to the laws,” while printing headlines like “Why the South Hopes for Lincoln’s Re-Election,” and “South for Lincoln.”<sup>65</sup>

The *Irish-American* similarly continued its steadfast support of the Union, as embodied in the Presidential candidacy of General George B. McClellan. The paper hailed McClellan as potential savior for a Republic “cannot survive another four years’ reign of imbecility and corruption like that which has already reduced us to the verge of ruin.” Pointing out the need for “a Chief Magistrate for the *entire* nation,” the New York paper hailed the Chicago Democratic Convention as the necessary tool to defend the “Constitution, condemned and disregarded.” The 1864 election provided Democrats with

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<sup>65</sup> *Pilot*, September 3, 1864, September 10, 1864; September 24, 1864; October 1, 1864; October 22, 1864. In the end, Lincoln prevailed by a 411,428-vote margin in the popular vote and tallied a resounding 212-21 electoral victory. The Irish and many other Catholic immigrants (especially the newcomers located in the northeastern cities) voted overwhelmingly for McClellan – see John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1997), 353-354. For a good biography of McClellan, see Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988). For a discussion of how Jefferson Davis and his administration attempted to undermine Lincoln and Northern resolve through their covert support and encouragement of the peace movement in the North, see Larry E. Nelson, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric: Confederate Policy for the United States Presidential Contest of 1864* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980).

the opportunity to defend “the inspiring watchwords of the Union, the Constitution, and the rights of states to cheer them to victory.” Prior to the election, the paper stated its faith that “the Democrats of New York City will present a firm, united front, not only in sustaining General McClellan for the Presidency and Horatio Seymour for Governor of the state, but also for the local candidates.”<sup>66</sup> Littered with endorsements for McClellan, the *Irish-American* printed a list of the Democratic candidates for its readers to vote for in the October 15 issue. When Election Day finally arrived, the paper even released the scheduled November 12 issue early, so as to issue one more reminder for its readers to get to the polls to support McClellan.

The *Irish-American* unsurprisingly supported McClellan in 1864, arguing that his election would bring back the Democratic principles of strict adherence to the Constitution and states’ rights, which would “sweep the Abolition Party into obscurity” and renew American greatness. McClellan’s platform of Union *and* peace seemed to allow for his supporters to oppose the Lincoln administration while still being patriotic. The *Irish-American* framed the contest as a choice between the “fanatical programme [sic]” of abolitionism and “the triumph of Constitutional liberty, and peace secured by the restoration of the Union.” The paper contrasted the Democratic principle of freedom of speech with the Lincoln record, “which had familiarized the American people with the gag law and arbitrary arrests, and imprisonment of citizens without trial or process of law.” Quite simply put, the election was a choice between the “fanatical programme [sic]” of abolitionism and “the triumph of Constitutional liberty, and peace secured by the restoration of the Union.” Many Irish responded quite angrily to those who did vote for Lincoln in 1864, most notably General Meagher. A letter to the editor from “A Celt”

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<sup>66</sup> *Irish-American*, August 20, 1864; August 27, 1864; October 1, 1864.

responding to Meagher's endorsement of Lincoln accused him of "throwing yourself into the arms of the Puritan Abolitionists who are to use you as their willing tool and instrument." Irish supported the Democrats "because the Democratic Party is and has been devoted to the Union."<sup>67</sup>

The *Pilot* also shaped election dialogue in patriotic terms. "To vote against the present incompetent head of the government will be pronounced an overt act of treason," the paper pointed out, as McClellan was "not only a soldier, but a constitutionalist." McClellan offered "peace, the Union restored, the Constitution unimpaired, the Constitutional rights of every one preserved," while Lincoln offered "War, fierce, bloody, long, disunion, the Constitution violated, Constitutional rights trampled upon, debt overwhelming and increasing, taxes burdensome, beggary, ruin, and national death." According to the *Pilot*, Lincoln was "honest" but not ready for primetime. The *Pilot* came to support the Peace Democrats. They were not the fanatics who caused the South to revolt or the ones who suspended habeas corpus or the supporters of conscription, "which is downright Caesarism." Rather they were the ones who had to come to the realization that only constitutional peace could save the Union. "Call them Copperheads – or any other ungentlemanly term you like," stated the *Pilot*, but "they are the only true representatives of Republican freedom today in this country."<sup>68</sup>

The *Pilot* turned the 1864 election into a matter of duty for its readers. "Faithful, union-loving, upright patriots" needed to make working "faithfully, and constantly, in hope, for a thorough change in the Administration," and the author qualified this as a

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<sup>67</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 226; *Irish-American*, July 30, 1864; September 17, 1864; "A Celt" to *Freeman's Journal*, October 22, 1864.

<sup>68</sup> *Pilot*, August 27, 1864; September 10, 1864; November 8, 1862; April 4, 1863. Despite being capitalized, this was referring to republican, not Republican, freedom.

“paramount duty of every citizen.” In Boston, the Irish Catholics overwhelmingly and almost without exception backed Lincoln and the Union war effort, at least until late 1862. “At one time we did support Lincoln,” the *Pilot* explained, but “he changed, and so have we.” By January 1863, the *Pilot* denoted that it had become “every man’s duty” to disagree with President Lincoln. The *Pilot* insisted that readers should support McClellan because, quoting McClellan himself, “The sole great objects of this war are the restoration of the unity of the nation, the preservation of the Constitution, and the supremacy of the laws of the country.” That was the way to “win” peace.<sup>69</sup>

The militantly Copperhead *Record* and *Freeman’s Journal* spewed much more rancorous rhetoric during the election season. As early as February 1864, the *Record* was warning that “with Lincoln’s re-election vanishes the patriot’s last hope.” The *Record* listed the following ways for the Union to be restored in April 1864: by sacrificing four to five million Northern soldiers, by instituting mountains of taxes to “crush” Northern workers, by destroying free speech, by practicing miscegenation, by making states into provinces, by creating an American aristocracy whose wealth increases would equal the increase in poverty, by destroying and plundering Southern towns, by confiscating Southern property and selling it to blacks and others, by taking away suffrage from poor Northern whites, by establishing an enormous standing army to hold down the South and discontented North, by abrogating habeas corpus and jury trials in favor of Yankee blue-law, by emancipating all slaves and enslaving Northern freemen, by overthrowing the principle of self-government and rapprochement with despotisms like Russia, and “by the complete overthrow of the Constitution, on the ground that it is ‘a league with death and

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1995), 87-88; *Pilot* quoted in O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 89; *Pilot* quoted in O’Connor, *Civil War Boston*, 138; *Pilot*, August 13, 1864; July 23, 1864.

a covenant with hell.’” The net result of all this new restored Union was an overthrow of the American Revolution, claimed the article. “By having the history of our revolutionary struggle written over again, with the view of placing George Washington and Patrick Henry and their compatriots in their proper position of traitors to the benign, and humane, and liberal Government of George the Third. This is essentially necessary, because, if those men were living at present day, it is most probable they would be equally blind to the blessings of the Government devised by Abraham Lincoln and his supporters.” Even so, the *Record* felt that should McClellan win and continue the war in any way, shape, or form, he would have an even “blacker name in history than Abraham Lincoln” for betraying the “principles of true Democracy.” And after Lincoln’s re-election, the paper claimed that the Chicago Convention that nominated McClellan had never embraced the principles of true Democracy anyway. Instead, “it was simply organized and conducted on the sole ground of opposition to the Lincoln Administration,” and it failed to include “any reference whatsoever to the PRINCIPLE OF SELF GOVERNMENT.”<sup>70</sup>

In the end, the *Freeman’s Journal* came to support McClellan “not for his sake, nor as, feeling security that his election would bring us the restoration of liberty, or of our free institutions, but as a *rebuke* of the infamous usurpations of Abraham Lincoln’s administration.” Even when Lincoln won, it was announced not as a victory but as a mere endorsement by the ballot box. His victory meant the end of a federal system of government, a victory for “the old, miscalled “Federalists,” who were, really, monarchical *consolidationists*.” By June 1864, the *Freeman’s Journal* was referring to the president as “Abraham Africanus I,” though McClellan was considered just as bad for

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<sup>70</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, February 27, 1864; April 30, 1864; September 24, 1864; November 19, 1864.

his promises of a “*more* vigorous prosecution of the war” and his speaking about an exclusive “American nationality,” which the paper found to be at odds with true Democratic principles. The paper also rejected his war policy, arguing that “*War* cannot settle the question between the States. Not “*war alone*” – but *war!*” The *Freeman’s Journal* stated that “*people who are opposed to the war to elect candidates who are for the war, is SIMPLY ABSURD!*” The *Freeman’s Journal* refused to support McClellan over Lincoln. “The opposition to McClellan is *not* personal,” read the paper, but rather based on “*principle.*” By September 10, 1864, the *Freeman’s Journal* reluctantly announced support for the Democratic challenger, “if McClellan is for *peace.*” E.C. Boutwell of Philadelphia felt that there were just two war candidates though, and if the Democrats failed to nominate a peace man, they may as well “vote for Lincoln, and let the country go to the devil.” McClellan had betrayed Jefferson, “the apostle of American liberty,” and his party by refusing to embrace peace as the only means of restoring the Union. In the view of the *Freeman’s Journal*, the Democrats had betrayed the “*fundamental principle* on which the Democratic party was built...the *strict construction of the Constitution* – the *strict limitation* of the Federal branch of Government to the powers specifically enumerated in the Constitution.”<sup>71</sup> In 1864, the Democratic party in the North had rejected this core party tenet.

The *Herald* never embraced peace like other Irish periodicals did. In late August 1864, when the Union war effort was sputtering, the *Herald* still proclaimed that “the North is not for peace on any terms.” The paper argued that “The UNION is not the agent of the states. The UNION is supreme.” Even this late in the game, the *Herald* still

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<sup>71</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, November 12, 1864; November 19, 1864; November 26, 1864; June 25, 1864, August 13, 1864; August 27, 1864; September 10, 1864; E.C. Boutwell to *Freeman’s Journal*, September 10, 1864; September 17, 1864; December 17, 1864.

equated American Union with the prospects of freedom: “*The greatness of America is the entire work of our glorious Union.*” The same article predicted that if the South won, it would continue to fragment and spark even more civil wars.<sup>72</sup>

### **Reconstruction as Un-American**

When the Union armies marched into Richmond in April 1865, the *Record* lamented the victory of the “anti-democratic and anti-American doctrine of coercion,” as “the armies of the Union entered as conquerors of the sovereign State of Virginia.” While others celebrated the momentous occasion, the *Record* called such behavior “rejoicing over the subversion of the Constitution” and a “solemn reversal of the actions of our forefathers in ‘76” The *Record* referred to the Republican Party as “Girondists and Jacobins” to distinguish between the conservative and Radical wings of the party: “traitor is too respectable a name for such miscreants as these!”<sup>73</sup>

As with coercion, emancipation, and conscription, the Irish opposed any impediments to the full and immediate repatriation of Confederate states back into the Union. They framed their campaign against Reconstruction on the same Unionist principles they espoused throughout the war itself. Each of these actions constituted the government overstepping its bounds and violating the Irish view that those who wish to be an American (or not be an American) should not be coerced against their will. Southerners should have been allowed back into the Union if that is what they desired. As such, to varying degrees, the American Irish opposed the very concept of Reconstruction. While Radical Reconstruction policies were most at odds with Irish

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<sup>72</sup> *Catholic Herald*, August 27, 1864; February 27, 1864.

<sup>73</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, April 15, 1865; February 10, 1866.

Unionism, they opposed any delay in reconstructing the Union as it had been back in 1861. Military occupation of states that wished to re-enter the American Union was at odds with the Irish conception of America. People and states alike should choose whether they wanted to be American; they should not be forced back in under Radical overlords. In keeping with their support of unconditional Unionism and unfettered reconciliation, the *Irish-American* demanded that President Johnson let the Southern states immediate repatriation and forego any and all notions of Radical Reconstruction. Like with Irish fleeing oppression in Europe, Southerners wishing to join America should have been afforded full American citizenship. According to the *Irish-American*, “the suppression of the rebellion, has, in its consequences, been quite as subversive of the unity of our country as the rebellion, if successful, could possibly be.” Demanding that state governments reign supreme over military districts, the *Irish-American* pointed out that “as good Democrats, we regard *principles*, not *men*; and if Andrew Johnson prove recreant to the principles in which he was educated, we say that he is worthy of the severest reprobation of every Democrat in the land.”<sup>74</sup>

Despite their consistent opposition to Lincoln throughout the war, many Irish actually supported his lenient Reconstruction plan, at least as compared to ideas of how to reunite the country. The *Irish-American* supported re-unification of the country a “blest reunion” and “truly hoped” that Andrew Johnson would follow the same Reconstruction policy as Lincoln had intended. The *Irish-American* lamented the arrest of Southern-supporting Irishman John Mitchel, and used the occasion of the nation’s birthday to call for getting “back to the common sense principles, to the sober truths that

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<sup>74</sup> *Irish-American*, August 19, 1865. For a comprehensive examination of Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

actuated those who founded the Republic.” Being such committed proponents of bringing the country back together, the *Irish-American* even opposed Lincoln’s lenient Ten Percent Plan, arguing that taking the requisite oath was unconstitutional and that allowing one-tenth of voters to rule a state was an “*un-Republican* method of governing, and totally at variance with the spirit and intent of our institutions.”<sup>75</sup>

After the assassination of Lincoln, the *Freeman’s Journal* attacked Andrew Johnson and his relaxed Reconstruction policies. Johnson’s desire to disenfranchise the Southern elite was labeled as “the very blindness of folly!” The *Freeman’s Journal* found the entire concept of Radical Reconstruction ridiculous. Apparently, the federal government found itself “too *weak* to be magnanimous.” From the core Democratic principles regarding personal liberties, “Andrew Johnson has departed *wider* than even did Lincoln,” who as a former Federalist Whig, “so far as he knew anything about politics, grew up to believe in loose and large constructions of federal power.”<sup>76</sup> Johnson, the former Democrat, had become a traitor to Democratic principles and un-American in refusing to allow *all* who wanted a place under the American Union that chance.

By October 1865, the mounting national debt and prospective increase in taxes left the *Freeman’s Journal* comparing America to England. Traditionally, the majority of Americans enjoyed the fruits of their labor, unlike in England, where “the enormous *national debt*” had led to an unfair distribution of wealth. The American national debt “has now distanced England – and all other nations,” and “it looks as if the English system of immense wealth in the hands of the few, and poverty hovering on the border of

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<sup>75</sup> *Irish-American*, April 8, 1865; April 22, 1865; June 24, 1865; July 1, 1865; December 19, 1863

<sup>76</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, May 27, 1865; June 10, 1865; August 5, 1865.

death” was now the norm in America. By 1867, the *Freeman’s Journal* had proclaimed the revolution of 1861 complete. Quoting John Adams on the real American Revolution having taken place in the hearts and minds of the people, the paper went on to say that again, the hearts and minds of the people before 1861 had constituted the real revolution. For fifty years prior, the Northern people had “been running towards the common rut of a centralized government,” and “the Revolution from the system of self-government to a military despotism is *already* almost complete” The only hope was that “before the torpor of the public mind becomes fixed and chronic, there may be brought about a *counter revolution*.”<sup>77</sup>

In the 4<sup>th</sup> of July issue of the *Record* in 1865, the paper called for a “Proclamation of General Amnesty restoring Americans to all the rights for the maintenance of which the men who gave the birth to the Republic pledged their lives, fortunes, and their sacred honor.” The same issue blasted the Republicans for their position on Andrew Johnson’s “liberal use of the pardoning power” on account of their belief it was unconstitutional. “What inconsistency!” announced the *Record*, for “these very same persons applauded every unconstitutional measure and act of the government for the past four years.” The *Metropolitan Record* even called Johnson’s conservative Reconstruction plan un-American, as it allowed all but the richest Southerners their citizenship and voting rights back. The paper called upon President Johnson, “as he is a man, a husband, and a father, as he is an American citizen,” to set aside his current policy as “impolitic, unwise, un-American, anti-democratic, and arbitrary.” A letter to the editor signed by “A Democrat” questioned Johnson’s right to appoint governors to sovereign Southern states, and asked

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<sup>77</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, October 28, 1865; March 23, 1867.

“If President Johnson insists upon keeping his foot on the necks of the Southern people and freeing their slaves, what right has he to democratic support?”<sup>78</sup>

In a March 1866 call to support Johnson, the *Record* boiled the country’s problems down to “one issue now before the country – shall the President, or shall the Jacobins and Anarchists rule.” The *Record* called on “the true men who, whatever may have been their previous differences of opinion, are still true to the general principles of constitutional liberty – let them organize a bold and determined opposition to the enemies of the President wherever they may be found.” Despite the vitriolic demonization of Lincoln, the *Record* lauded his policy of forgiveness towards the South in their article reporting his assassination. Taking the chance to blast the Radical Republicans, the *Record* proclaimed its sincere “hope that no change will be made in the course which it is said he intended to pursue towards the South, and that the mad counsels of the radicals will not prevail.” The *Record* supported a seamless transition in allowing the Southern states back into the Union, arguing that the “‘Rebels’ of ‘76” were States’ Rights men themselves, so “no man in the Republican ranks can consistently deny this last right unless he indeed be prepared to condemn the Fathers of the Republic, and to brand them as traitors.” The paper took Washington’s Birthday in 1866 as a chance to discuss the condition of his home state of Virginia. “Fettered and manacled, ruled by military autocrats, harassed by incessant interference, hampered by endless restrictions, and irritated and humiliated by the galling consciousness that she is in the power of a mean and unmanly foe.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, July 1, 1865; June 10, 1865; “A Democrat” to *Metropolitan Record*, July 22, 1865.

<sup>79</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, March 3, 1866; April 22, 1865; May 13, 1865; February 24, 1866.

The *Herald* also disagreed with the *Freeman's Journal* on the prospect of allowing the seceded states equal standing in a negotiated peace. The *Herald* supported Lincoln's lenient Reconstruction policy but remained opposed to him throughout the war and his re-election bid. According to Joseph George, Jr., "Given the background of religious and racial animosity in Philadelphia up to that time, moderation in newspapers opposed to the Lincoln Administration was of some assistance in furthering the war effort."<sup>80</sup>

The *Pilot* supported President Johnson in his attempts for a quick transition for the seceded states back into the Union. "Can any true friend of his country oppose this policy?" the paper asked. Johnson used the Constitution as his "sheet anchor," while the Radical Republicans were "drifting on the billows of revolution and destruction." By 1866, the *Pilot* was calling the Republican (or "Union") Party the "Radical anti-Union, anti-constitutional party." Irishmen voting for the Republicans would be akin to throwing themselves into "the jaws of a hyena," as Radical Republican principles "are the natural enemies of everything that is called Irish." They objected to their patriotism being impeached and their military services being marginalized by Radical Republicans: "this is pure, unadulterated, shameless, and atrocious scoundrelism."<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Irish consistently touted their "Unionism" throughout the Civil War era. They rushed to defend the Union in 1861 but had become disillusioned with the Republican war effort by late 1862. Morale plummeted as Irish casualties rose, and the

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<sup>80</sup> *Catholic Herald*, February 27, 1864; George, Jr., "Philadelphia's *Catholic Herald*," 213-214, 221.

<sup>81</sup> *Pilot*, March 3, 1866; July 14, 1866; September 22, 1866.

Emancipation Proclamation alienated them. Notorious racists, the Irish were not willing to support a war to free the slaves. This manifested itself during the New York City Draft Riots. The Irish begrudgingly supported McClellan in the 1864 Presidential election, although some of the more rabidly anti-war papers considered him merely the lesser of two evils. After the war, they attacked President Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policy, arguing that it was unfair to deny states entry back into the Union.

Irish newspapers consistently alluded to Jeffersonian ideology as their defining political identity. The Irish argued that government did not have the right to legislate the behavior of citizens or states. Forcing a citizen into the army via conscription, impelling a state back into the Union at gunpoint, or refusing to allow a state re-entry into the Union all conflicted with the Irish notion of a limited federal government. The Irish objected to that but also to how Lincoln and the Republicans prosecuted the war. Irish newspapers frequently asserted that Lincoln had overstepped his bounds and become a tyrant. He had subverted the legacy of the Founding Fathers while trashing the Constitution and betraying his constituents. The Irish used these ideas as the basis for legitimizing their opposition to the ruling party and its war.

Whatever their self-serving reasons for opposing Lincoln may have been, the Irish claimed higher motives for opposing him. They called his politics un-American and implied that the great republican experiment began by the Founding Fathers was at stake. Lincoln and the Republicans were akin to European monarchs. They were overstepping their bounds and needed to be stopped to save the Union. In that way, the Irish could dissent to Lincoln's war effort while staking out the high ground as defenders of the great Founding Fathers. In this way, the Irish used Americanism to qualify their dissent.

### CHAPTER III – “VERY UNREPUBLICAN AND ANYTHING BUT AMERICAN”: THE CIVIL WAR IRISH AND THE “UN-AMERICAN”

#### Introduction

The Civil War Irish encountered a wave of discrimination from native-born Americans when they settled in the United States. Nativists attacked the American credentials of Irish Catholic immigrants, and these prejudices blossomed into a full-fledged political movement centered in the northeast that culminated with the establishment of the American Party (better known as the Know-Nothing Party). The Know Nothings labeled the Irish *un-American*; the movement was vehemently anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and emphatic in its denunciation of their Americanism. Mainstream Americans attacked their American qualifications, pointing out that they had not yet contributed to the American nation. The Know-Nothing Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, founded in New York in 1852 but rising to infamy in New England in subsequent years, initially required members to be American citizens but also be the child of “American-born parents, and paternal or maternal grandparent, or of parent or grandparent who took an active part in the Revolutionary War in favor of this Government.” Later, this requirement changed to be “a native-born American, a Protestant born of Protestant parents; reared under Protestant influence, and not united in marriage with a Roman Catholic.” In an 1854 Independence Day parade in Boston, the Irish were accused of requesting to carry a flag depicting the Pope with his boot on the throat of George Washington. When one group of nativists picked a fight with the Irish of Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1854, they called for “Americans” to assist in provoking the Irish. When nothing came of it, the fifteen hundred assembled “Americans” stoned a

Catholic Church and broke the windows of several Irish-American homes.<sup>1</sup> “Native” Americans asserted that they were the only true Americans and that Irish immigrants were not capable of becoming full-fledged Americans. The Irish could not have disagreed more.

As Dale T. Knobel argued, “native” Americans in the antebellum and Civil War eras actually “drew self-identity from their attitude toward an ethnic minority they characterized as un-American,” ethnicity being an identity to which other characteristics such as religion and politics became tied. Since little other than English ancestry linked nativists together, nineteenth-century Americans were searching for a collective self-identity; they were exploring what it meant to be an American. It was widely accepted that republicanism was the key. During the early 1800s, an authentic American was one who had the intelligence and moral fiber to adequately participate in and contribute to the great democratic experiment. When the Irish came on the scene in large numbers after 1845, many “native” Americans affiliated Irishness with characteristics unbecoming of a genuine, capable American. Nativist organizations such as the American (or Know-Nothing) Party rejected the notion that Irish and other foreigners could ever learn how to become an American. The Irish were often described with adjectives predicated with “un,” as nativists set out to create a new American ethnicity. The Irish were consistently subjected to accusations of un-American behaviors and characteristics; “native” Americans viewed them as foreigners incapable of sustaining American republicanism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston: In the Various Stages of Its Development, 1604 to 1943*, Volume 2 (New York City: Sheed & Ward, 1944), 680-683.

<sup>2</sup> Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, 5, 13, 47-51, 133-134, 144. In his more generalized book on the history of American nativism, Knobel defined the nativist movement as a 150-year struggle to “define American ‘nationality’ restrictively by identifying who among those residing in the United States was authentically ‘American’ and who was ‘alien.’” Knobel argued that nativists were not inherently racist, as

Since nativists deemed the Irish to be inherently unqualified to participate in the American republican experiment, nativists wanted the Irish precluded from cashing in on the benefits of American citizenship. Robert Dunne argued that antebellum America was an arena that hosted a battle over who was entitled to the “American Dream,” the vague notion that Americans who worked hard should live with all the comforts that American life could afford its successful citizens. According to Dunne, the myth of the American Dream was the “nation’s dominant cultural myth,” closely guarded by the dominant WASP culture. Determining that the Irish and others were not worthy of American economic and political rights, these nativists sought to keep the American Dream for themselves. Dunne reasoned that in order to properly examine how the ideological constructs of “America” and “American Dream” evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, it is essential to trace how clashes between “foreign” groups such as the Irish culture over who could pursue this American Dream.<sup>3</sup>

Irish-American leaders accused native Americans of being un-American and incapable of performing the rigors necessary to uphold the republican greatness of America. The Irish laid claim to the truest, purest brand of Americanism. Irish-Americans boasted that it was their religion, politics, experiences, and worldview that constituted the most wholesome variety of republicanism and freedom. All those with whom they clashed were labeled as not merely wrongheaded political adversaries or Old World religious rivals but as *un-American* subversives. As false purveyors of freedom

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they did not accede the determination of American inclusion to distinctions such as race. Rather, they assigned American-ness to whom they desired, both for ideological and practical reasons – see Dale T. Knobel, *“America for the Americans”*: *The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Dunne, *Antebellum Irish Immigration and Emerging Ideologies of ‘America’: A Protestant Backlash* (Lewistown, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 2-10.

and America, the foes of the American Irish constituted a legitimate threat not just to themselves but also to freedom itself. The Irish had themselves adopted intolerant attitudes in regards to the American Dream. By casting their rivals as such, the Irish in America laid claim to their American Dream. The chief forum for these Irish-American leaders during this period was the immigrant press.

The Irish by their very nature presented an interesting test case during the American Civil War. Despite their staunchly Democratic politics, revulsion with Lincoln, fierce opposition to emancipation, propensity to blame the Republicans (and secessionists) for the secession crisis, and their rather feeble hold within a society indifferent and often hostile to their plight, the Irish nevertheless fervently supported the Union War effort. When the Republican Party supplanted the Know-Nothings in the late 1850s, the American Irish transferred their abhorrence of the Know Nothings to this new party of abolition and nativism. Liberation of the slaves was a particularly distressing concern for the Irish, as the release of millions of African Americans into the free labor economy would have dramatically reduced their social standing and earning power. Feeling that the Constitution protected slavery rights in the South, and needing the government to protect those rights so as to protect the already feeble Irish-American socioeconomic standing, the Irish fiercely opposed anti-slavery elements of the population and their wartime objectives. They framed it as an issue of Americanism. By supporting anti-abolitionist policies, Irish leaders claimed that they were being more American than were the abolitionists who sought to undo the workings of 1776.

Irish-American Unionism during the Civil War was primarily a form of civic nationalism (although they remained proud of Irish achievement). While rebels identified

themselves as a race distinct from their Northern brethren, Northerners embodied a civic nationalism (a shared loyalty based on common citizenship and identification with national history). Some Southerners proclaimed that they were a separate race, and myths that Southerners were descended from English cavaliers while northerners were heirs of Puritanism resonated with Southerners. The word *yankee* became an ethnic slur. The Northerners, however, followed Lincoln by declaring the war to be a “people’s contest.” They framed their success after the war in terms of saving the republic.<sup>4</sup> Irish-American nationalism dovetailed with this northern civic nationalist ideology, even though the Union for which the Irish fought often looked much different than the Union for which many other Northerners fought.

To the Irish, the war was to save the Constitution and the Union even though those concepts best accommodated the predicament of Irish Americans. As long as the Civil War was a war to save the Union, the Irish steadfastly supported it, in spite of their differences with the Republicans in charge. The Irish desired a return to the status quo, which included upholding slavery. They believed this would protect their socioeconomic status as well as the Constitution. The United States had provided them refuge from the horrors of their homeland, and despite the obvious American shortcomings, the Irish were exceedingly loyal to the United States for providing them with a chance to live the American Dream. Political freedom and any semblance of a reasonable subsistence were

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<sup>4</sup> James McPherson, “‘Was Blood Thicker Than Water?’ Ethnic and Civic Nationalism in the American Civil War,” in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 143, no. 1(May 1998): 102-108. Irish Confederate John Mitchel’s national identification with the South reinforced this idea. Deeply influenced by his racism and hatred of abolitionists, Mitchel claimed that he felt like a Southerner because Southerners were of a different race. He felt Southerners were Celtic, at least in that they were kindred spirits with traditional Celtic culture – see McGovern, *John Mitchel*, 133-136.

luxuries not afforded them in their homeland, so loyalty to the Union which had provided such luxuries proved to be a guiding force for Irish sensibilities.

To legitimize their status as full Americans with access to these American comforts, the Irish often classified certain people, ideas, and political concepts as un-American. Irish immigrants instantly identified with America, and their America was a revolving door for anyone in the world who embraced its principles (except for African Americans). The Irish-American press molded and promoted its own conception of what America meant. The Irish conception of America most notably embodied the principles of Unionism, individualism, political conservatism, Jeffersonian republicanism, and an inclusive citizenship based on an American universalism. The Democratic Party, freedom of religion, speech, and the press, strict construction of the American Constitution, protecting habeas corpus, and a war effort aimed at preserving (but not revamping or altering) the American Union were all the truly American notions, along with those who supported them.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, all the people, ideas, and political concepts with which the Irish disagreed were branded as *un-American*. While the Irish had quickly embraced Americanization upon their arrival, the evolution of Irish Americanism paralleled the trajectory of American history between the Civil War and the First World War. In 1860, America was merely a symbol and a beacon of hope for oppressed nations around the world. The American Irish equated the success of their American Union, with the hopes and dreams of their native land. Therefore, they considered anyone who threatened this

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<sup>5</sup> Irish “leaders” is the key here. Many Irishmen were ambivalent regarding the war but not the community leaders; they consciously worked to harness the meaning of the war to better the Irish social, economic, and political position – see Joseph G. Bilby, *The Irish Brigade in the Civil War: The 69<sup>th</sup> New York and other Irish Regiments of the Army of the Potomac* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Publishing, 1998), 20.

Union un-American. Eugene C. Murdock argued that to the foreign-born, the “Union” constituted only “an abstraction which failed to evoke the emotional reaction felt by a majority of the native born,” but the Civil War Irish actually passionately cherished the Union (at least what they believed the Union to represent).<sup>6</sup>

Irish leaders defined themselves against those who they claimed were undermining Unionism, which they labeled as *un-American*. The Irish accused abolitionists and secessionists, whom they deemed to be un-American political extremists, for threatening their American Union. Sectionalism, centralization, abolitionism, Puritanism, and political extremism were all un-American; anything the Irish were not was eligible for classification as un-American. Anything that could be construed as English or European was labeled un-American. The aristocracy, oligarchy, autocracy, and exclusive *jus sanguinis* (blood-based national citizenship) and/or *jus soli* (birthplace-based national citizenship) concepts of citizenship of the Republican Party were all English, and thus, un-American.<sup>7</sup> Political extremists who set out to disrupt the wedded bliss of the American Union, both secessionists and abolitionists alike, were un-American as well.

### **Irish-American Universalism**

During the Civil War, the American Irish embraced and promoted what I will call an American universalism, a civic brand of nationalism and inclusive citizenship. It was a choice to be a full American citizen, and perpetual subjecthood was deemed un-

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971), 305-306.

<sup>7</sup> Most countries, including the United States, have blended these two concepts in determining citizenship eligibility. For a good introduction to their meaning, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 81-82.

American. For the Irish, American citizenship meant embracing a set of principles which were worldwide in nature, yet the Irish-American conception of American citizenship was closely tied to individualism as well. Americans, while all brought together by their shared civic nationalism and devotion to freedom, were not to be dragged down by an overbearing central government. America was no greater than the sum of her parts. According to the *Freeman's Journal*, "The American theory [of citizenship] gives more right to the individual – the man," while the "British doctrine of 'once a subject, always a subject'" gave too much to "the community – the government." The religion of Rome "appeals to the conscience, and where the intellect and the conscience are both enlightened, the man is made master of himself – a self-governing unit – the fountain of the political power recognized by American institutions," while the European governments rode "docile, human herds" with the "impious titles of majesty."<sup>8</sup>

Simply put, acceptance of American citizenship trumped all other civic loyalties. This embrace of American principles took precedence over the ethnic origin of the American; once one chose to be an American, one always remained an American. According to the *New York Freeman's Journal*, "The American theory of citizenship cannot be intruded upon the acceptance of another nation, requiring it to abandon its own principle on the subject in favor of ours." Advocating the universal admittance of this principle, the author pointed to how American citizenship cherishes and celebrates the "interpretation of individual rights" against foreign governments poking into the affairs of American citizens who had long since abrogated their foreign allegiances.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, July 2, 1859; July 16, 1859.

<sup>9</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, July 16, 1859

It is not difficult to see why liberal inclusive citizenship appealed to Irish Americans, or which major political party championed their cause: As the *Freeman's Journal* said, "The Democratic aim is to maintain the political equality of American citizens. It insists on the guaranteed rights of adopted, as of native-born citizens." As O'Gorman stated in a Democratic mass meeting in Albany, New York, "the great American Republic exists not for itself alone" but also for "the best interests of mankind all over the earth – their affections and hopes are mysteriously interwoven." Americanism was individualism, a ubiquitous independence, while exclusive British citizenship "rejects the principle of new nationalities springing from colonization, and is in spirit obsolete." Catholicism, Americanism, and individualism all went hand in hand. "The Catholic religion, first of all, appeals to the conscience, and where the intellect and the conscience are both enlightened, the man is made master of himself – a self-governing unit – the fountain of political power recognized by American institutions," said the *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>10</sup>

This debate over citizenship manifested itself in Massachusetts in 1859. In that year, the *Boston Pilot* commented on the fierce debate over a proposed amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution advocated by many Republicans and Know-Nothings in the state which would disallow naturalized American citizens from voting for two years. For native citizens of the United States, only one year of residence in Massachusetts was required. The paper blasted the distinction, arguing that the Constitution gave the Congress the sole power to define American citizenship, and it excoriated the conception of varying levels of citizenship inherent in the proposed change. While Governor

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<sup>10</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, July 7, 1860; July 2, 1859; July 16, 1859; Richard O'Gorman in *Irish-American*, November 8, 1862.

Nathaniel P. Banks recommended the changes as “a protection to the rights of *American* citizens,” the paper believed it would roll back the rights of naturalized American citizens like the Irish and thus “perpetuate one of those acts of unbearable tyranny which the Congress of the Revolution, in the Declaration of Independence, declared to be one of the principle counts in the indictment against the King of Great Britain.” The Irish protested that discrimination against naturalized citizens in a country based on civic duty was English, and thus, un-American. According to the *Pilot*, accepting American citizenship meant renouncing all other civil loyalties, as “naturalization is no...half-and-half process.” Any attempt to downplay the Americanism of the Irish or discount their contributions was considered a phony patriotism. As Father William Corby stated, only when nativism was eradicated could “We call ourselves a free people, bound together by the most sacred ties that patriotic blood is able to cement.”<sup>11</sup> For the American Irish, American citizenship trumped all other loyalties, even if ethnic pride still coursed through their veins. To view it otherwise was un-American.

Irish Americans advocated Americanization as a conscious civic choice. As Massachusetts Governor John Andrew told Colonel Thomas Cass of the 9<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers in thanking him for the services of his predominantly Irish-American regiment, “as religion knows no distinction in humanity, so the United States knows no distinction in nationality among those who become her citizens.” By early 1862, an Irish Catholic-supported bill was signed into law allowing students in public

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<sup>11</sup> *Pilot*, February 12, 1859; July 2, 1859; Father William Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac*, ed. Lawrence Frederick Kohl (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 70. Born in 1833 to an Irish father and a Canadian mother, Father Corby was best known during the Civil War for the absolution he conferred upon the soldiers at Gettysburg. While the Catholic Church never officially took sides, Father Corby encouraged the men by melding duty to God and country. He wrote his memoirs in 1893 from memory – see Lawrence Frederick Kohl, “Introduction,” in *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, ix-xi, xxii.

schools in Massachusetts to refuse to read certain passages from the Bible that went against their “conscientious scruples.” This fell in line with the Irish affinity for individualism, letting American citizens do as they please with minimal government oversight. The *Pilot* praised this new law as a “long stride” from the Know-Nothingism of the mid-1850s and as a patent acknowledgement of the loyalty and patriotism displayed by “the adopted citizens in this hour of national trial.”<sup>12</sup>

In February 1862, the *Pilot* called for the “Prompt Americanization” of all foreign emigrants to the United States. Americanization was a prudent, practical matter that would assure that all new emigrants were devoted American patriots. Furthermore, “the greatness of America has more of its cause in the citizenship it has granted to foreigners, than in any other national fact. Without the inducement of citizenship, millions who have emigrated to our shores, had never touched them, and in the absence of emigration the U. States would be thinly peopled today.” The *Pilot* held “that all foreigners ought to be granted immediate citizenship. The sooner all the emigrants in the land are made Americans the better for America.”<sup>13</sup>

An article in the *Brooklyn Union* claimed that the Irish could not be trusted with American citizenship for their primary allegiance would always be to Ireland and not to America. “*An Irish adopted citizen who is as much an American as he is an Irishman is hard to find; though the purpose of the Naturalization law contemplates that he shall renounce everything but Americanism,*” read the article. It alluded to the existence of

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<sup>12</sup> Governor John Andrew to Col. Thomas Cass in Mary Alphonsine Frawley, *Patrick Donahoe* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 186; Thomas H. O’Connor, *Fitzpatrick’s Boston, 1846-1866* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), 199; *Pilot* quoted in O’Connor, *Fitzpatrick’s Boston*, 199. Bishop John Fitzpatrick of Boston worked with Governor Andrew in recruiting Irish-American troops, so long as he was assured they would have a Catholic chaplain. While he worried that Irish troops may be considered expendable and thus used as cannon fodder, he worked in the foreign service on behalf of the Union, even after 1863 – see O’Connor, *Fitzpatrick’s Boston*, 199-206.

<sup>13</sup> *Pilot*, February 22, 1862.

Irish organizations trying to nominate and elect politicians friendly to Ireland's plight and groups claiming to be Irish legislatures in exile which had cropped up in the United States. The *Pilot* rejected this, claiming that adopting American citizenship severed political ties with Ireland but not blood ties. "Now we, writing from an exclusively American standpoint, deny most unqualifiedly the right of any American to speak of citizens as if they were not citizens, as if they were 'aliens,' as if they were not fully recognized by the law of the land as citizens," claimed the *Pilot*, which pointed out that political citizens of the United States could still love their homeland after leaving (much as they could love their own mother after moving out of her home and living on their own). If a man made the decision to seek American citizenship, "he is made a citizen, by a process that is exclusively American. It is not an Irish, or an English, or a French, or a German process. And the citizen that is thus made a citizen is not, cannot be, an Irish citizen, an English, a French, or a German citizen." In taking the oath to the United States, however, the naturalized citizen "does not renounce all interest in, all attachment to, the land of his birth; nor is he required, directly or indirectly to do so."<sup>14</sup>

The *Pilot* rejected the term "Irish adopted citizens." Once one took an oath of American citizenship, "he is purely and squarely an American. As an American citizen, he can owe no allegiance, in the political order, save to America." The *Brooklyn Union* had accused "Irish adopted citizens" of organizing Irish legislatures in exile, but the *Pilot* denied that "Irish adopted citizens do anything of this kind or purport – simply because no such citizens of the country can possibly be found anywhere within its limits. No such citizens of Irish birth or origin as the 'culpable parties in the case,' then we [beg?] leave to ask what are the *legal rights* of citizens? Have not citizens the right to do anything that

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<sup>14</sup> *Pilot*, August 3, 1867; August 10, 1867.

is not expressly or constructively forbidden by the laws of the country?” As a letter to the *Brooklyn Union* said in 1868 (the letter was published in the *Pilot*), “If he be a citizen of our republic, he must be an American; if he be an American, he cannot be an Irish, or a German, or a French citizen.” In fact, “It is not from the fact or circumstance of having been born without the jurisdiction of our government that he derives his rights and privileges as a citizen of our country...it is by virtue of his citizenship, solely, that he has any right to participate in our domestic affairs. It does not make a particle of difference what his own purely personal wishes or purposes may be. If he be a citizen, he is bound to perform his duties as a citizen, as an American.”<sup>15</sup>

After the war, Fenians who returned to the British Isles to fight for Irish freedom brought this issue to the national forefront. Those Civil War veterans felt that the Irish had earned American citizenship and deserved protection from the American government in perpetuity. The British government steadfastly held to the idea that citizenship was infeasible, while the American government considered citizenship a matter of choice. The Irish-American notion of citizenship matched up squarely with the latter. During the late 1860's, Irish-American Fenians captured in Great Britain were often jailed, particularly after the suspension of habeas corpus in February 1866. The *Pilot* claimed that Irish love for America knew no bounds; their Civil War service had proved it and their countrymen deserved full protection from the American government back in the British Isles. “Irishmen love their country as George Washington, and John Hancock,

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<sup>15</sup> *Pilot*, August 24, 1867; “An American Citizen” to *Brooklyn Union*, October 23, 1868; *Brooklyn Union* printed in the *Pilot*, November 28, 1868.

and Samuel Adams loved theirs. Yes, they love it better, because it has suffered more, been stabbed more ruthlessly, and made to bleed more deeply” read the *Pilot*.<sup>16</sup>

Several letters to Irish-American newspapers demonstrate these sentiments. As “Emerald” said in demanding the release of Stephan Meany and other Irish-American citizens from British jails, “Adopted citizens have not shed their blood on the red fields of the South to rot in English prisons, or be hung without a fair trial.” A letter to the *Pilot* in August 1867 further decried the case of Meany, a Fenian arrested by the British government for treasonous statements he had made while living in New York City. Like other Fenians, Meany had spoken out for Irish freedom, which he had every right to do under American law. After severing his ties with the Fenians in May 1866, Meany returned to England to visit family and was incarcerated, convicted, and sentenced “*for what he did in a free American city!*” The author explained that “it is not a Fenian case, nor yet an Irish case; but the case of every native of a foreign land who has transferred his allegiance to this republic.” If the State Department were to just sit idly by, the case of Stephan Meany meant that “naturalization is a sham, and the Declaration of Independence is a nullity.”<sup>17</sup>

In April 1866, Bostonian George Cahill wrote U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain Charles Francis Adams in reference to Cahill’s friend John Connor’s February 1866 arrest in Kerry. Cahill emphasized Connor’s poor health as a result of his multiple Civil

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<sup>16</sup> Gibson, *Attitudes of the New York Irish*, 196; *Pilot*, August 18, 1866. Fenians claimed that the British had no right to try a Fenian, as it violated their American citizenship. The U.S. Congress seemed to agree and passed a resolution officially sympathizing with the Fenians and asking the president to intervene on behalf of the imprisoned naturalized citizens. A July 1868 bill passed assuring equal rights to native and natural-born citizens, with both parties adopting a new inclusive citizenship view. As a result, many Irish joined the Republican Party – see Walker, *Fenian Movement*, 158-167. These men personified the link between Americanism and Irishism – see Michael H. Kane, “American Soldiers in Ireland, 1865-1867” in *Irish Sword* 23, no. 91(Summer 2002): 103-140.

<sup>17</sup> “Emerald” to *Pilot*, November 28, 1867, printed December 7, 1867; P.A.C. to *Pilot*, August 13, 1867, printed August 24, 1867.

War wounds in pleading for clemency. “No single man from Massachusetts has done any more than him to uphold the honor of the old Bay State,” boasted Cahill. After running away from school to join the 28<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, Connor worked his way up to a Captain’s commission (“without friends or influence”) and commanded the regiment in its final few battles before being mustered out. Wounded in the hip at Cold Harbor and in the groin while “rallying the scattered men of other regiments in the desperate charge which saved our left flank at Weldon Railroad,” Connor went home to recoup his health after the war. Only twenty-one years of age, Cahill pleaded that he was “too young to rot in an Irish jail” and asked Adams to do anything possible “consistent with your duty to procure his freedom.”<sup>18</sup>

For the Irish, supporting the Union war effort entitled them to all the fruits of American citizenship. As Charles G. Halpine said of a typical Irishman joining the Union war effort, “the thought was that he was earning a title, which no foul tongue or niggardly heart would dare to dispute, to the full equality and fraternity of an American citizen.” Colonel Patrick R. Guiney weighed in on his conception of open American citizenship in an October 22, 1862 letter to Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, thanking the governor for his “generous efforts to expunge from the Constitution of Massachusetts that provision which would make political distinction between us and our brothers in hope, conviction, disaster, and victory.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> George Cahill to Charles Francis Adams, April 11, 1866, Folder 2, Box 3, George Cahill Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>19</sup> Spann, “Union Green,” 193. Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts agreed that future generations would remember that the Irish answered the call of duty when the war broke out – see O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 88; Colonel Patrick Guiney to Governor John Andrew, October 22, 1862 in Christian Samito (ed.), *Commanding Boston’s Irish Ninth*, 144.

Peter Welsh saw the Civil War as an opportunity to *earn* his American citizenship. In a February 3, 1863 letter to his wife, Welsh proclaimed the purpose of his letter as being to explain to her the reasons he enlisted and thus convince her to see “our situation in a different light.” To Welsh, the war effort was not merely one of free states against slave states but a test of freedom itself. His political views on citizenship molded his duty to his country. As an American immigrant, Welsh felt that “this is my country as much as the man that was born on the soil and so it is with every man who comes to this country and becomes a citizen.” As a result of his unsurprising view of the equal rights of naturalized citizens such as himself, he felt a duty since “I have as much interest in the maintenance of the government and laws and the integrity of the nation as any other man.”<sup>20</sup>

Welsh demonstrated how the Irish viewed America as the universal champion of all oppressed peoples and as an agent of world freedom when he wrote that “even to those who are not citizens [sic]...the integrity of this nation is a matter of the greatest importance.” Since “this is the first test of a modern free government in the act of sustaining itself against internal enemies [sic] and matured rebellion,” everyone who loved “free government and equal laws are watching this crisis to see if a republic can sustain itself in such a case.” According to Welsh, the fate of all free men lay with the Union, for “if it fail [sic] then the hopes of millions fall and the designs [sic] and wishes of all tyrants will succeed. The old cry will be sent forth from the aristocrats of Europe that such is the common end of all republics.” America meant opportunity for all, a

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Welsh to his wife, February 3, 1863 in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 64-65. Unlike many Irish Americans, Welsh did not lose faith in the Union war effort after the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg (only six of over two thousand Union regiments suffered high casualty rates than did Welsh’s 28<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts) and release of the Emancipation Proclamation – see Lawrence Frederick Kohl, “Introduction,” in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 2-5.

meritocracy as opposed to Southern and European aristocracies. As Welsh saw it, those who had come from Ireland and other oppressed countries lived in comfort in America, and “if not in comfort in nine out of ten cases it is their own fault.” The lack of an American aristocracy was the key pillar of American freedom. Lacking the “bloated petted [sic] rascals or what is called in the monarchical countries the aristocracy” allowed even the poorest parents to dream that their children could reach “the heist position that a great nation can bestow before him.” America meant opportunity to rise and fall based on your own merit, an opportunity not afforded many Irish back home. “There is something in this land worth fighting for,” he said.<sup>21</sup>

Welsh believed that America had been a sanctuary for the oppressed people of Ireland, and they owed America allegiance in exchange for that protection. To Welsh, America offered a place where even the poorest citizens could rise to “all the honours and highest position that a great nation can bestow.” He told his wife Margaret, who opposed his participation in the war, to “contrast the condition of the masses with any other country in the world.” He then asked “Is this not worth fighting for?” Welsh told his wife in February 1863 that if America “should now fall then away with all hope of liberty in Europe and particularly for poor old Erin.” For Welsh, it was critical that the United States to remain a city on a hill up at which the entire world could look. He saw it has his duty to “sustain for the present and to perpetuate for the benefit of future generations a government and a national asylum which is superior to any the world has yet known.”<sup>22</sup>

The Irish claimed that the Union war effort was essentially a proxy war fought for world freedom. Father Michael Creedon of Auburn, New York echoed these sentiments

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Welsh to his wife, February 3, 1863, in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 65-67.

<sup>22</sup> Welsh quoted in Kohl (ed), *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 50; Welsh to his wife, February 1863, in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 63; Welsh quoted in Kohl (ed), *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 2.

in an April 1861 sermon where he reminded his congregation that they were indebted to the United States for being a refuge for Irish Americans; it was “the first country the Irishman ever had that he could call his own country.” As a result, he implored “every Irishman who hears me to enlist.” In a speech printed in the *Irish-American* in August 1862, former Irish brigade commander General Michael Corcoran, who had recently been released from a Confederate prison camp, explained how nothing distinguished him as a soldier save for his “fidelity to the Union,” and the spirit of the Irish people being “true to American institutions.” At the St. Patrick’s Day Dinner celebration of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in New York City in 1861, James T. Brady (an ardent states’ rights proponent, tabbed by Judge Charles Patrick Daly to speak at the dinner) toasted the United States by stating that the American Republic belonged not just to Americans but to all mankind. Since Brady typically addressed over one hundred Irish audiences per year, his words certainly would be heard. The *Pilot* started a series in September 1862 entitled “Records of Irish-American Patriotism,” which was designed to “demonstrate that even though the Celts were only half American in name, they were 100-percent Americans in deed.”<sup>23</sup> It was an ideological war effort for the freedom all of humanity.

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Demeter, *The Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>* (Pasadena: Cranford Press, 2002), 24-25. Demeter traced the evolution of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York from the Civil War through the Second World War. Demeter focused on military campaigns but also the formation of the regiment and the conditions of the Irish in New York. The four primary reasons for Irishmen to enlist in the Union Army were for American nationalistic ideals (repaying the debt they owed to the United States for taking them in), antagonism to Great Britain (which supported the Confederacy), enlistment bonuses (which were enticing for the financially-destitute Irish), and to gain military training for later use in liberating Ireland - see John Mahon, *New York’s Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>: A Regimental History of Service in the Civil War’s Irish Brigade and the Great War’s Rainbow Division* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), 9. The main reason Mahon neglected to mention is the Irish desire for acceptance into American society; as Meagher expressed it, they wanted validation in the eyes of their American peers - see Cornish, “An Irish Republican Abroad,” 148-149; *Irish-American*, August 30, 1862; Richard C. Murphy, *The History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in the City of New York* (New York City: J.C. Dillon Co., 1962), 304. Judge Charles Patrick Daly was a prominent Irish American and staunch Union Democrat in New York. The President of the Union League in New York City (which advocated killing Abolitionists and Copperheads alike), he often spoke to Irish-American crowds on the pressing issues of the day - see Harold Earl Hammond, *A Commoner’s Judge: The Life and Times of*

Some of the prominent Irish-American memoirs echoed the sentiments of contemporary sources. St. Clair A. Mulholland called the war to fight and preserve the legacy of the world's only true republic, as it was "the holiest, noblest, purest and best cause that ever summoned men to arms." As Irish-American soldier Daniel George MacNamara said in his history of the Irish Ninth of Massachusetts, "It can be said without egotism, that in patriotism, in valor, in love for the American flag, the Constitution and the Union of the United States, the Catholic Irish-American soldiers take no second place, and the survivors stand today in the front rank to uphold, as they did in the war, all the principles of true American citizenship." According to MacNamara, patriotism and love of country were as alive and well with Irish-Americans as it was with native-born Americans.<sup>24</sup>

Although he was seemingly unconcerned with politics, Corby was a strong Unionist who found Lincoln to be a strong yet tender-hearted leader. In January 1864, Corby encountered a group of women who had lost family members in the Irish Brigade. Corby pointed out that the dead soldiers of the Irish Brigade had died "in the cause of Union and liberty!" The "sons of Erin" could appreciate that, since their forefathers had died for generations fighting for the same thing. To Corby, it was better to "die in a good

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*Charles Patrick Daly* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1954), 168-169; O'Connor, *Fitzpatrick's Boston*, 202.

<sup>24</sup> St. Clair Mulholland, *The Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment, PA Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion*, ed. Lawrence Frederick Kohl (New York City: Fordham University Press, 1996), iv-v. Born in Ireland in 1839, Mulholland joined the 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, which was overwhelmingly (though not officially) Irish in make-up. He transcribed his memoirs in 1899, wishing for future generations to boastfully proclaim that "Father was a soldier of the Union" – see Lawrence Frederick Kohl, "Introduction," in *The Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment*, ix-xx and Mulholland, *The Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment*, iii; Daniel George MacNamara, *The History of the Ninth Regiment MA Volunteer Infantry, Second Brigade, First Division, 5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, Army of the Potomac, June 1861-June 1864* (Boston: E.B. Stillings & Co., 1889), ix, 5. MacNamara effusively lavished praise on the Irish-American love of country and bravery of the fighting unit. He rejected the idea that native-born soldiers could love their country more than the Irish, who by fighting for the Union were following in the footsteps of their ancestors during the American Revolution – see MacNamara, *History of the Ninth Regiment*, 43-44.

cause than to starve to death under the iron heel of despotism” as so many Irishmen had throughout history.<sup>25</sup>

### **Lincoln and the Republican Party Un-American**

In its broadest sense, the American Civil War was a war fought over the meaning of America. To the American Irish, it was a war for republicanism, and the Republican Party was anything but republican. To the Irish, the Republicans were tyrants. They were English. They were un-American. They defined freedom incorrectly, and they conspired against the Irish. As William Hanchett said, “The Irish were not moved by Lincoln’s vision of the Union as the hope of world freedom. It had not meant freedom for them.” The Irish, a persecuted and foreign group squeezed into ghettos in northeastern cities, had a different definition of freedom and of America. The Democratic Party aligned more closely with Irish views on the American Republic, and their Catholic heritage tended to make them conservatives by nature. The Republicans were the heirs of Know-Nothingism, and as George F. Train wrote in an 1869 letter to Boston Fenians, they needed a “Know-Something Party.”<sup>26</sup>

Irish-American periodicals demonstrated this perceived faux Republican republicanism by facetiously placing the word Republicans in quotations or printing it in italics. Accordingly, the *Irish-American* claimed that the “Republicans” had “rather a vague conception” of freedom, and voting for the Republican ticket during the late 1850s

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<sup>25</sup> Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, 214. Corby dolled out compliments by citing one’s Unionism. Father Ouellet, chaplain of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York, was an “intense lover of the Union” – see Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, 301.

<sup>26</sup> William Hanchett, *Irish: Charles G. Halpine in Civil War America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 76; Spann, “Union Green,” 207; George F. Train to Boston Fenians, January 7, 1869, Folder 25, Box 3, George Cahill Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

was the same as voting “for the overthrow of all the most sacred guarantees of the Constitution.” The “‘Republican’ Party merely talk ‘freedom,’” noted the *Irish-American*, but only “to deride and blaspheme it.” The paper rejected the notion of Republicans as soldiers of freedom on behalf of their abolitionism by exclaiming “Neither directly nor indirectly, immediately or remotely, does or will the present contest affect the freedom or the slavery of one human being.”<sup>27</sup>

As they did with the “Republicans,” Irish-American papers mocked the American Party (or Know-Nothings) by sarcastically calling them the “American” Party or *American Party*. The contrast between the American Party’s America and the Irish America could not have been more stark, and the Irish accused them of incorrectly and disingenuously defining America. The “American” Party, as they called themselves, was at odds with what the Irish viewed America to mean. As the Know-Nothings fought against “Popery, slavery, and foreignism,” the Irish countered by arguing that “he is not the friend of the naturalized citizen who would put a distinction between him and his fellow citizens, of what ever birth or creed. If we have any rights, it is not because we are Irish born or German born, or Catholic or Protestant, but because we are Americans, whether by birth or adoption it matters not: the Constitution and the laws recognize us equally, and he seeks to travel outside that recognition is not our friend nor the friend of this Republic.” The Irish wanted no distinctions between any Americans. Indeed, it was the responsibility of the Irish in America to “vote as Americans and *nothing else*.”<sup>28</sup>

To the Irish, their politics reflected the most American political ideal, while their opponents’ politics undermined American values. Their political philosophy was

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<sup>27</sup> *Irish-American*, October 31, 1857; November 6, 1858.

<sup>28</sup> *Irish-American*, November 5, 1859.

egalitarian and populist, while the Republican outlook was aristocratic and elitist. Of the “two schools of politics” that were lined up “face to face” in American politics, the Democrats were the only one with “a generous confidence in *the people*.” The only party faithful to the Jeffersonian ideal of American democracy, the Democratic Party was “the only national, the only truly *American* party.” The Republicans, meanwhile, were “set over against the democracy” and carrying titles like “the “Republicans,” so called, and the Know-Nothings, or pseudo-“Americans.” The Know-Nothings set out to de-Americanize the Irish Americans by forcing “the grandsons of Revolutionary patriots to abandon the religion of their choice, or, by an odious test, they would exclude them from offices in the republic” while the “Republicans” rallied “under the cry of an irrepressible conflict.” The “Black Republicans of the South” sought to “impose *their* ideas of right and wrong on communities of American citizens,” which constituted an attack on the most cherished principles of Jeffersonian Democracy. The *Freeman’s Journal* equated the Republicans with the forces of oppression overseas. Lumping all these un-American political forces together under the “Federalists” umbrella, the *Freeman’s Journal* deduced that “the Stuarts, the Bourbons, and the absolutists in general, have ruined themselves in Europe precisely as the Federalists have done in this country.”<sup>29</sup>

Irish Americans used their politics to define their Americanism in the Civil War era. After the *New York Tribune* tried to marginalize the Irish by exorbitantly claiming that ninety percent of the votes in a New York City mayoral election had been cast by Irish adopted citizens (thus implying that the Democratic Party as a whole had not supported the same candidate as that foreign subsection of it), the *Irish-American* responded by saying that Irish naturalized citizens embraced the Democratic Party

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<sup>29</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, January 7, 1860.

because they believed it to be “more Republican and more national” than any other political party in the country. Irish acted “not as Irishmen but as American citizens” in their support for the Democrats over the “Republicans.”<sup>30</sup> While the Republican Party perverted liberty and republicanism, it was the Democratic Party that embodied its truest manifestation.

Jeffersonian political ideology resonated with the American Irish. States’ rights, a hands-off, frugal federal government, and a populist affinity with the common man were policies that reverberated with this largely poor (and often destitute) group of Catholic foreigners. These principles helped color the sense that anyone could become an American if they embraced the republicanism of the American Revolution. For the Irish, the Democratic Party culturally and principally embodied everything that it meant to be an American, while the Prohibitionism, Nativism, and abolitionism of the Republican Party was everything they considered to be un-American. The Irish found the Republican Party’s nativism and abolitionism to be mutually exclusive with Americanism, and they felt that Republicans imposed their idea of personal behavioral standards on Irish and others, in clear violation of American individualism. Democrats saw Republican rule as increasingly moving toward a restrictive and exclusive American society, “forcing conformity to a narrow set of behavior patterns” of the Protestant and Puritan persuasion. Not only would the Republican Party tell a man that smoking was a bad habit, but it would “knock the cigar out of his mouth,” claimed the *New York World*. It was a party of

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<sup>30</sup> *Irish-American*, December 12, 1857.

intervention and exclusion, as opposed to the party of non-intervention, of to each their own.<sup>31</sup>

Along these same lines, Democrats viewed the Republican party as vastly overreaching the hands of the federal government. They saw no difference between the purview of the federal government between peacetime and wartime; the Constitution was just as binding when the nation was at war. The Republicans violated the Constitution, an unchanging and binding contract, throughout the war with their civil liberties abuses and emancipation. To Democrats, Republican rule meant subverting the Constitution and destroying the very Union already under attack. The Democratic rallying cry was “the Constitution as it was, the Union as it is.”<sup>32</sup>

What actually tied these conservatives together more than anything else was their strict constructionist interpretation of the Constitution, which left no room for encroachments on civil liberties due to extenuating circumstances. Like Jefferson and Jackson, Copperheads believed in the old ideology of republicanism and were quick to caution against burgeoning threats to liberty and usurpations of power that could ultimately lead to tyranny. They attacked Republicans much like American Patriots had

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<sup>31</sup> Joel Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 73-77. For more on the culture of Northern Democrats during the Civil War and Reconstruction, see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). For a general history of the Democratic Party from its infancy in the Jeffersonian era through modern times, see Robert A. Rutland, *The Democrats: From Jefferson to Carter* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979). For an in-depth analysis of the party’s Jeffersonian roots and emphasis on republicanism and the importance of a virtuous citizenry (and thus to establishing the conditions necessary to assure the continuance of a virtuous citizenry), see Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) and Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). To see how Democrats were able to abandon some of their Jeffersonian agrarianism as the Market Revolution and increasing industrialization were transforming the American economy, see Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 77-82, 87.

attacked King George III and the British government during the American Revolution. The Copperheads did not want the Union to lose; they only wanted to return to the status quo as things had been in the antebellum period.<sup>33</sup>

The Republicans seemed to ignore all considerations regarding the plight of poor, immigrant classes like the Irish. It struck the Irish as odd that while the “anti-slavery party” loudly proclaimed a literal adherence to the clause in the Declaration of Independence that proclaimed “all men are created equal,” yet from that group still came “the principal influence against allowing to immigrants who have made their home in the United States political rights.” At the most basic level, these two groups defined freedom in a fundamentally different way. Abolitionists saw freedom as the opportunity to rise and fall based on one’s individual merit. The idea was that once freed from the shackles of slavery, the former slaves would succeed or fail based on their work ethic and their personal talents and abilities. Within the parameters of Republican political ideology, scant room existed for considering the economic plight of foreign groups like the Irish. Inequalities inherent within class were precluded from this view, because that would eliminate freedom as being specific to each individual.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of these circumstances, the Irish opposed black freedom and rejected the notion that this was hypocritical. Heckling greeted abolitionist Cassius M. Clay when he spoke at an Irish freedom rally in the fall of 1862. Clay equated the plight of the African American with that of the Irishman, equating the falsehood of English superiority

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-4, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Pilot*, July 3, 1858; Gilbert Osofsky, “Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism,” *American Historical Review* 80, no. 4(October 1975): 890, 903. Osofsky’s primary argument was that exclusivity within Garrisonian ideology (their unwillingness to recognize class inequalities and cultural differences across the American populace) doomed the prospects of an ecumenical movement. Equating Irish and black freedom simply did not appeal to the Irish masses.

over the Irish with Irish feelings of black inferiority. “I would enslave neither the Irishman nor the negro,” Clay preached in the face of incessant jeering and booing. The *Pilot* pointed out that abolitionists never seemed to care about the vast numbers of Irish who lived in worse poverty than slaves. The paper rejected the analogy comparing the condition of the Irish in Ireland to the blacks in America; one was political tyranny while the other was merely the natural order of things. Historian Brian Kelly pointed out this great paradox that the segment of the white northern population that was socioeconomically closest to the slave was the segment most opposed to helping them out.<sup>35</sup> Whether this was due to racism, economic competition, or a combination of both, the Irish always couched their opposition to abolition as upholding their American principles.

According to the *Pilot*, the presence of the phrase “all men are created equal” (and those men holding “inalienable rights”) in the Declaration of Independence was “a mere rhetorical flourish” on the part of Thomas Jefferson; it did not apply to blacks. The paper questioned the motives of the Republican Party, who disingenuously used the phrase to support the anti-slavery plank in the platform, yet opposed granting full political rights to immigrants living in the country. After Judge Edward Loring ordered escaped slaves removed back to their owners under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act, Republican Governor Banks had the judge removed. The *Boston Pilot* interpreted this as the “American-Republican” Party being hypocritical, as it had been “laboring zealously to make it appear that American institutions are exposed to dangers from Catholics and

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<sup>35</sup> Man, Jr., “The Irish in New York,” 98; Mulcrone, “The Famine Irish and the Irish-American Press,” 60-61; Kelly, “Ambiguous Loyalties,” 168.

immigrants.”<sup>36</sup> In reality, the danger came from the Republican abolitionist agenda, claimed the Irish.

The freedom the Irish fought for was individual freedom, property rights, and checks on centralized power; they were Jeffersonian, strict constructionist Democrats to the core. The *Freeman's Journal* also made it clear to Southern Democrats that they sympathized with the plight of southerners who wished to take their slaves elsewhere based on property rights outlined in the Constitution. “Every Democrat recognizes the equality of the States and the equality of citizens of different States.” Thus, the paper professed, “Every Democrat recognizes, also, the property possessed by the master in the labor of his slave and that this property is, equally with all other kinds of property, a proper subject for the protecting action of government.”<sup>37</sup>

Checking the reach of the federal government was a key cog in the Democratic Party, and Irish-American periodicals like the *Freeman's Journal* made this into an issue of union and disunion. The *Freeman's Journal* expressed a strict constructionist view of the Constitution, as it pointed out that “our true liberties consist in the preservation of those *personal* rights.” The paper went on to say that “It is to be understood that there is no community of true American citizens, North or South, who will submit to be overridden in regard to their rights of local self-government by the Federal power. Northern “Republicanism,” therefore, leads straight to disunion.” Along with quotations from the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the *Freeman's Journal* announced that both the Lincoln and Davis administrations had consistently overstepped their bounds by

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<sup>36</sup> *Pilot*, July 3, 1858; March 27, 1858.

<sup>37</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, July 7, 1860.

“resting on bayonets for their power.”<sup>38</sup> By touting their dedication and devotion to Democratic Americanism, the Irish could then acrimoniously attacked an unpopular Republican president and his wartime expansion of executive power.

The *Pilot* objected to the Republicans and “super-loyalists” monopoly on American patriotism. The Irish claimed their Unionism and politics were the key to their true American patriotism, which was threatened by the phony patriotism of the Republicans. To restore the Union, the *Irish-American* claimed that sectionalism needed to be stamped out, in both the North and the South. Each state needed to be left its Constitutional rights, and the Lincoln administration was violating those sacred principles. The Lincoln Administration “continues to be a history of repeated usurpations of power and of violations of the Constitution, and of the public and private rights of the citizen,” claimed the paper, which felt the Republicans were asking them to give up their party and their principles, as opposed to just supporting the Union.”<sup>39</sup>

As a result, the Irish overwhelmingly supported Stephen Douglas for President in 1860. His embodiment of Jeffersonian equality and his commitment to an egalitarian society bereft of elitism and privilege resonated with Irish Americans, who also considered him the lone Unionist candidate. The *Pilot* called popular sovereignty the “first great principle in American politics,” and framed the decision for voters as “Douglas, Popular Sovereignty, and Union or Republicanism, Intervention, and Disunion.” As a letter to the New York *Freeman’s Journal* said in October 1858 in regard to the Lincoln-Douglas Senate race, “Let no one, then, fail to vote; for if Douglas is crushed, good bye to the Democratic Party’s success, and likely, also, good bye to the

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<sup>38</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, July 26, 1862; August 4, 1860; June 27, 1863.

<sup>39</sup> *Pilot*, June 9, 1866; *Irish-American*, May 24, 1862.

Union.” In contrast to Douglas’s platform of popular sovereignty was “Lincolnism,” a vague entity that the *Pilot* framed as a large umbrella under which “Abolitionists of every shade” belonged, from the “milk-and-sop philosophers” to the “John Brownites.” Prior to the 1860 presidential election, the *Pilot* aptly summed up Irish-American opinion when it stated that it was necessary to “crush out abolitionism at the north and disUnionism at the south. Both have risen together, and should be extirpated together.” The *Pilot*’s call for Irish-American voters to turn out on Election Day was entitled “The Union Against the Republicans.”<sup>40</sup>

To Irish sensibilities, the crowded election field of 1860 had but one truly American candidate. Of the four tickets, “one is superfluous, two are dodges, one only represents the principles, and appeals to the enthusiasm, of patriotic citizens” said the *Freeman’s Journal*. The paper could not “accept “Republicanism,” so called” nor the “opposite sectionalism of a Southern clique,” and the Constitutional Union ticket of Bell and Everett was “*superfluous*, for the very reason that the *true* “Union Candidate” is Stephen A. Douglas, the champion of Union principles, and the exponent of constitutional rights.” While not objecting to Bell and Everett on ideological grounds, the *Freeman’s Journal* feared losing “the votes they draw from men who simply love the *Union* and the *Constitution*,” which rightfully should be cast for “the only party candidate

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<sup>40</sup> *Pilot*, July 28, 1860; “X.Y.Z.” to *Freeman’s Journal*, October 16, 1858, printed October 30, 1858; *Pilot*, October 20, 1860; November 3, 1860. Stephen Douglas’s reputation as a pro-slavery compromiser (and thus, political moderate) and common man undoubtedly bolstered his popularity amongst the Irish. Stephen A. Douglas was above all a moderate Unionist and a product of his coming of age during the era of Jacksonian Democracy. An ambitious man of the people and quintessential Northern Democrat, Douglas’s moderate position on slavery and Manifest Destiny greatly appealed to Irish leaders. For an exhaustive biography of Douglas detailing these themes, see Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). For a thorough account of how Douglas and Lincoln squared off in a decades-long political duel over how the country would govern itself and ultimately how it would define freedom, see Roy Morris, Jr., *The Long Pursuit: Abraham Lincoln’s Thirty-Year Struggle with Stephen Douglas for the Heart and Soul of America* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2008).

who stands for that Union and Constitution.” The “malignant and unpatriotic” party of “Black republicans of the South” were the disunionists like William L. Yancey, Robert Rhett, who had also nominated an undeserving “luck” for president. Breckenridge and Lane were candidates for the “coalition of Administration-corruptionists and Yanceyite-disunionists,” and upon their candidacy “it would be unbecoming for us to waste many words.” Despite their staunch opposition to Lincoln, however, Irish newspapers were far more staunchly proponents of Unionism at all cost. As the *Freeman’s Journal* put it, “If Lincoln be elected according to the Constitution and the laws of the country, *he shall be inaugurated according to the Constitution and the laws.*”<sup>41</sup>

After Lincoln’s election, the Irish-American press tried to de-Americanize the Republican Party and President Lincoln himself by attaching Lincoln and his party’s names to hereditary and oppressive European titles. The *Irish-American* called Lincoln’s trip to Washington in February 1861 a “Royal Progression,” in stark contrast to the traditional and proper manner in which the president quietly assumed power. The *Freeman’s Journal* classified the Republican Party as monarchical, asserting that the party intended to transform “not the *nature*, but the mere *form* of our government. They sigh for a *Monarchy* or an *Empire!*” By June 1864 (post-Emancipation Proclamation), the *Freeman’s Journal* had resorted to calling Lincoln “Abraham Africanus I.” In calling for Lincoln’s impeachment, the *Metropolitan Record* claimed he had as much power as a

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<sup>41</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, July 14, 1860; July 28, 1860. John Bell was the nominee of the Constitutional Union Party, with Edward Everett as the Vice Presidential candidate. The party tried to avoid the issue of slavery – see Joseph Howard Parks, *John Bell of Tennessee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). Douglas R. Egerton argued a premise that would have resonated well with these writers at the *Freeman’s Journal*. According to Egerton, William Yancey and Robert Rhett conspired to assure Lincoln’s election by “throwing” the 1860 Democratic convention. In doing so, they obtained the necessary preconditions by which they could push for secession. This left Douglas in an impossible political predicament, pushing compromises unacceptable to both the North and the South – see Douglas R. Egerton, *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and the Election That Brought on the Civil War* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

Russian autocrat. The *Pilot* agreed, arguing that Lincoln had consolidated more power in his office than Alexander the Great, Napoleon, or Charlemagne ever had. “Lincoln is *autocrat* of America,” stated the paper.<sup>42</sup>

The Irish remained steadfast in their defense of individual rights and unregulated freedom of speech as part and parcel of true Americanism. When Thomas Francis Meagher left the Democratic Party and announced his support for Lincoln in 1864, he claimed that the Democratic Party had betrayed its founders by strictly adhering to the “captivating pretexts of State Rights, habeas corpus, and other claims.” The *Irish-American* mocked him by questioning whether the “other claims” he referred to “include freedom of speech and the press, and such trivialities.” A letter to the editor from “A Celt” responding to Meagher’s endorsement of Lincoln accused him of “throwing yourself into the arms of the Puritan Abolitionists who are to use you as their willing tool and instrument.” Irish supported the Democrats “because the Democratic Party is and has been devoted to the Union.”<sup>43</sup>

Other Republicans who abused their wartime power were also labeled as un-American. For example, when General Ambrose Burnside proclaimed martial law in Kentucky so as to only allow “loyal” persons to vote there, the *Irish-American* again objected on Constitutional grounds. In their view, an election held “under the terror of the bayonet” was a sham comparable to elections held by Louis-Napoleon of France. The *Freeman’s Journal* resorted to demonizing the president and his supporters. “In the despicable form of a *serpent* the devil deceived our first parents,” explained the paper,

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<sup>42</sup> Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish*, 120; *Freeman’s Journal*, May 14, 1864; June 25, 1864; *Metropolitan Record*, April 11, 1863; *Pilot*, March 21, 1863.

<sup>43</sup> *Irish-American*, October 15, 1864; “A Celt” to *Freeman’s Journal*, October 7, 1864, printed October 22, 1864.

and “through the mean shape of New England ideas, propagated with diabolical industry and by diabolical craft...the Yankee fanatics succeeded in electing Abraham Lincoln to the office of the President of the United States, according to the *letter* of the Constitution – hence all our woes.”<sup>44</sup>

While the Irish generally identified with a Democratic brand of Americanism, they always touted principle over party. By focusing on parties over principles, politics had become sectionalized. The *Herald* advocated reorganizing American politics based on the principles exhorted by Washington, or America would “fall into European domination and political slavery!” In response to accusations of Democratic disloyalty, O’Gorman pointed out that as a loyal Democrat, “Where I owe allegiance, there I pay it with all my heart. Neither king nor kaiser, president nor provost marshal, can rightfully claim any fealty from me. To the Constitution of the United States...that I and you and all of us are bound to uphold, support, and defend.” In an April 1861 letter to the *Irish-American*, an Irish soldier stated that almost all the recruits in his unit were Irishmen. While they were “all Democrats,” they all “swear hard against Jeff Davis” and felt that a wrong had been committed against their adopted country. They were “not fighting for a party.” In alluding to Jefferson and other Founding Fathers, the *Herald* felt that political parties served no purpose: “in the Church, they terminate in schism and infidelity. In the State, they terminate in that rank spirit of hatred and malice.” The *Herald* continued, “What a pity it is that, according to the advice of WASHINGTON, the people of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Irish-American*, August 8, 1863; *Freeman’s Journal*, November 15, 1862.

United States did not, years and years ago, discard the rancorous spirit of partyism altogether!”<sup>45</sup>

Thomas Francis Meagher’s political evolution throughout the war provided an interesting example of how the Irish clung to their Americanism. “A Democrat at heart,” he wrote in his *Irish News* before the outbreak of the war, “I rejoice in a thorough identification with those who constitute the bone and sinew of Democracy, and from whom the majestic Republic derives its robust life, adventurous activity, and wealth.” After Sumter, however, Meagher announced loyalty only to the Union. In an 1861 recruiting speech, he proclaimed that while he was a staunch Democrat, he cared “not to what party the Chief Magistrate of the Republic has belonged. I care not upon what plank or platform he has been elected. The platform disappears before the Constitution.” By October 1863, Meagher had had his fill of party politics. He indicated this in a letter to Captain James R. O’Beirne (President of the United Irish Societies). “An American citizen it is my ambition to be in the highest sense of the title,” Meagher wrote, but “an American partisan (black Republican, Democrat, or devil) – Never!” Meagher wrote to Colonel Guiney that Jacksonian Democrats of years past had been American citizens “in the boldest and proudest interpretation of the word” but that by contemporary times, being a Democrat meant being “a partisan of a selfish and consciousnessless [sic] faction.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Catholic Herald*, June 15, 1861; O’Gorman in *Irish-American*, November 8, 1862; “A Voice from the Twelfth Regiment” to *Irish-American*, April 22, 1861, printed May 4, 1861; *Catholic Herald*, April 27, 1861.

<sup>46</sup> Meagher quoted in John Paul Jones, *The Irish Brigade* (Washington: Robert B. Luce, Inc., 1969), 14, 98-99; Thomas Francis Meagher, “Some Letters of T.F. Meagher,” *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* (1938): 83-87; Meagher to Colonel Guiney, October 7, 1863 in Samito, *Commanding Boston’s Irish Ninth*, 225-226. Like Meagher, Guiney came to oppose his fellow Irish Americans politically, as he supported Lincoln in the 1864 election. Echoing Lincoln’s frustrations, Guiney often complained about McClellan being too slow and cautious, even at the height of his popularity. He loathed the “hero worship” of McClellan in Irish ranks and complained that they should channel that devotion to

The Irish were fighting to preserve the Union as it was and not to reconstruct the Union in Republican form. The *Pilot* claimed that “the South hopes for Lincoln’s Re-Election,” and claimed that the Know-Nothing/Free Soil/Republican Opposition was distinguishable from the Democrats by its “cold selfishness, its narrow bigotry, its presumptuous arrogance, and its open hatred and ill-concealed, if at all concealed, contempt for the equal rights of the poor and laboring classes.” Still, “the vital difference between the two parties was...that one proceeds upon the idea of PRESERVING THE UNION and the other upon the idea of RECONSTRUCTING THE UNION.” The *Pilot* aptly summed up Irish-American feelings about the war effort when it said “there is hope for the Union as it was, and for the Constitution as it is.” The *Pilot* grew irritated by the change in war objectives. While the Democrats stood for the restoration of the Union that was “no longer the object of the Government,” the Republicans wanted to make “another union.” The Republicans wanted “to make another Constitution,” while the Democrats sought to preserve the Constitution the way it was.<sup>47</sup>

Republicans discredited Democrats and unflatteringly branded them as Copperheads (denoting disloyal and subversive antipathy toward the Union). Governors Oliver P. Morton of Indiana and Richard Yates of Illinois trumped up charges of Copperhead conspiracies by covertly infiltrating Democratic clubs and encouraging treasonable activities. In addition, Republican papers fictionalized subversive activities of prominent anti-war Democrats. The scathing editorials gracing the pages of the *Record* often got others into trouble as well. When Irish Catholic Daniel Flanagan, editor of the Mason, Ohio *Democrat*, reprinted some of these opinions, he served a six-month

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the union instead. These sentiments led to many Irish to call for him to be replaced as commander of the Irish Ninth as a result – see Samito, *Commanding Boston’s Irish Ninth*, xiv-xxvii, 163.

<sup>47</sup> *Pilot*, October 29, 1864; December 24, 1864; September 5, 1863; May 7, 1864.

jail sentence. The *Record* even compared Lincoln to the most nefarious of figures: “Satan grasped at power and fell. This Administration grasped at power, and it, too, will fall.”<sup>48</sup> Irish Americans took the 1864 election as the last chance to kick Lincoln and his cronies out of office.

The Irish accused Lincoln of being a power-hungry autocrat committed to suspending American liberties so as to pursue anti-American wartime objectives. In a column blasting Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus, the *Irish-American* claimed the president and his party were tearing down the pillars of freedom in the Constitution, which was destroying the Union that stood as a “beacon-like example” for the “down-trodden of all the Earth.” Ever-dedicated to a free press, the *Irish-American* blamed the Radical journals, which they claimed had no circulation amongst the soldiers, for conspiring to stop dissenting newspapers from being distributed amongst the troops. The *Irish-American* contrasted the Democratic principle of freedom of speech with the Lincoln record, “which had familiarized the American people with the gag law and arbitrary arrests, and imprisonment of citizens without trial or process of law.”<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most famous arrest was of former Ohio Governor Clement Vallandigham, whose acrimonious condemnation of Lincoln and his war effort made him the poster child of the antiwar movement and thus brought the support of every Irish-American paper in New York. The *Irish-American* claimed that men politically opposed or lukewarm on Vallandigham had come to support him because “they feel that in his person the most precious rights of the citizen have been flagrantly violated.” If men could have their rights trampled upon as Vallandigham had, then “the Union for which

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<sup>48</sup> Frank L. Klement, “Catholics as Copperheads during the Civil War,” in *Catholic Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (January 1980): 36-57; *Metropolitan Record*, May 7, 1864.

<sup>49</sup> *Irish-American*, September 26, 1863; February 21, 1863; September 17, 1864.

the nation has already made such heavy sacrifices would be a worthless undertaking.” Vallandigham and the Irish viewed the Republican agenda as one of transforming the United States and destroying the Union. Like Vallandigham, the Irish-American rallying cry was “the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was.” Vallandigham was telling the Irish what they wanted to hear and played on their fears when he spoke to them on the subject of blacks, and he had “no difficulty in convincing Irish-Americans...that they should hate abolitionists and New Englanders.”<sup>50</sup>

Many Irish Democrats recognized how Vallandigham and other Copperheads stained the loyalty of the party at large. “Now Colonel I am a Democrat have always been one but God save me from being a Vallandigham man for such are Copperheads,” reads a letter from an Irish soldier to Col. James A. Mulligan. While the man agreed that the Lincoln administration was not blameless, he clearly loathed the Copperhead distinction and informed Mulligan that he needed to actively separate himself from such a label. “I cannot see the difference between a Copperhead and a rebel,” Trader claimed, except “that the Copperhead is more infamous.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham and the Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), 1, 108, 134; *Irish-American* quoted in Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish*, 149. According to Klement, Vallandigham embodied the radical wing of the Copperhead movement. The quintessential states’ rights politician, Vallandigham called slavery evil, yet always maintained that it could not be ended except by the various states. Klement argued that Vallandigham embraced political martyrdom and exile in fighting for wartime civil liberties. Republicans exaggerated his influence and essentially used him as a propaganda tool. For a more general account of Copperheads and Midwestern opposition to Lincoln, see Frank L. Klement, *Lincoln’s Critics: The Copperheads of the North* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1999). While Klement argued that the Republicans played the fear card by exaggerating claims of Copperhead strength, Jennifer Weber claimed that Copperheadism was a potent and widespread political force. By defining the term Copperhead broadly enough to include any antiwar Democrats and/or conservatives, Weber argued that the war split towns across the Union and turned neighbors against one another. Weber asserted that by the summer of 1864, the movement nearly took over the Democratic Party and politicized Union soldiers, most of whom turned against them, embraced the Emancipation Proclamation, and became lifelong Republicans – see Weber, *Copperheads*, 1-12

<sup>51</sup> E.H. Trader (Uniontown, PA) to Col. James A. Mulligan, November 21, 1863, Folder 5 (Oct.-Nov. 1863), Box 2, James A. Mulligan Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

While the *Freeman's Journal* lamented the Southern fanaticism at Fort Sumter, it immediately attacked Lincoln as a tyrant. On April 20, 1861, it ridiculed his call for troops as a “foolish document,” and it generally criticized his power grabs as unconstitutional. By August 1861, the administration had had enough. James McMaster's *Freeman's Journal* was suppressed and barred from the Federal mails by the Lincoln administration, prompting the last issue to call itself the *Freeman's Appeal*. As “the *Journal* was conducted on the theory that the press was *free*,” the “*Freeman's Appeal* will be issued on the distinct understanding that under the new kind of government inaugurated by Mr. Lincoln and his Cabinet, the press is *not* free – as it used to be under the old United States government.” After publishing his *Freeman's Appeal* for three issues, the government arrested McMaster for the publication of a seditious newspaper. After spending a little over a month in jail, McMaster returned and eventually got the *Freeman's Journal* restored to the federal mail.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to their distaste for Republicans, Irish leaders also framed their loathing of Britain by qualifying anything British as un-American. The American Irish lumped all un-American ideas and activities together under the “English” umbrella. When Irish Americans arrived in the United States, they recognized that poverty was not a necessary pre-condition in American society (despite their struggles to succeed socioeconomically), and this intensified their anger over the squalor that existed back home. They blamed England for their condition in America. Editors blamed England for American nativism and for the Civil War itself. They claimed disunionist behavior was English in nature, and they compared political opponents to the British. A letter to the editor of the *Irish-American* in August 1857 blamed the abolitionist movement on the

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<sup>52</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, August 31, 1861; Kwitche, *James Alphonsus McMaster*, 122-133.

British, as the writer claimed that the “Pharisees of England” were sending missionaries to the United States with the intention of arousing abolitionist sentiment and thus “to sow discord – to divide the American people on that much-vexed question (of English origin) slavery, and thus to weaken the nation.” Another letter writer equated the rise in American aristocratic sentiment, which “turns up its nose at labor,” to those who considered “their own country as a second class nation; but the British is No. 1.” As the Irish feared and hated Britishism, the British also feared and hated Americanism during this time period. The British feared the extension of the franchise and the advent of other egalitarian institutions; this “Americanization” would lead to anarchy, they felt. They despised the stereotypical Yankee and instead identified with the aristocratic Confederacy.<sup>53</sup>

The Irish equated radical, extreme, and subversive behavior with Britishism, and morphed abolitionist New England with England. For example, the *Pilot* contented that John Brown was merely a tool of the English plot to bring down America, its chief commercial rival. It deplored the manner in which the Republicans celebrated Brown. According to the *Freeman's Journal*, “The feverish nonsense of Abolitionism is an import from England” that had died out everywhere but New England, the geographic hotbed of abolitionism. The paper claimed by 1863 that it was necessary to return to a confederation of states, as opposed to the America which was being run by New England;

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<sup>53</sup> Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 74-77; “Red Hand” (Boston) to *Irish-American*, August 7, 1857, printed August 15, 1857; *Irish-American*, October 3, 1857; Hugh Dubrulle, ‘We are Threatened with...Anarchy and Ruin’: Fear of Americanization and the Emergence of an Anglo-Saxon Confederacy in England during the American Civil War,” *Albion* 33, no. 4(Winter 2002): 583-586.

“*New Englandism* must be exterminated from our policy” by thrusting New England out of the Union.<sup>54</sup>

The Irish labeled secessionists and abolitionists as either inspired by or conspiring with England. Using Napoleon’s sarcastic remark about England being a “nation of shopkeepers” to argue that England was only taking the South’s side in the Civil War to turn a profit, the *Pilot* alleged that all Americans could now see that “English *selfishness* is the reason of English sympathy with the rebels – that English *avarice* is the strongest of all motives” and that for a few pounds, the British would “sink America in the ocean.” According to the *Pilot*, England had no place to lecture America on the laws of civilized warfare. “The history of England is a history of treason against the world,” and the English government was “hypocritical, malignant, treacherous, and cruel.”<sup>55</sup>

The Irish equated the British with abolitionist fanatics in the United States. The Irish newspapers painted them as more concerned with the well-being of black slaves than with the Irish. On June 29, 1861, the front page of the *Boston Pilot* pictured “Brother Bull” feeding and cradling an African American baby, while he rests one foot on an image of an apparently starving Irish family and the other foot on the figure of British military aggression in India. The following week, in the article “British Magnanimity to America,” the *Pilot* castigated “John Bull [as] a buyer and a seller, who has no soul for anything but profit.” Referring to the press and others who considered English support necessary for the subjugation of the rebel forces, the *Pilot* printed “Of the

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<sup>54</sup> O’Connor, *Civil War Boston*, 36-37; *Freeman’s Journal*, August 27, 1859; January 3, 1863.

<sup>55</sup> *Pilot*, July 6, 1861; January 30, 1864.

weaknesses of the country...one predominant one, for which every man in the land should blush...we mean excessive regard for English opinion.”<sup>56</sup>

The Irish claimed that British empathy for black slaves was fraudulent. The *Pilot* pointed out that the United States should have been able to reasonably expect the assistance of England in the Civil War due to England’s stance against slavery. However, the British had fooled the Americans and only denounced slavery due to an ulterior motive. According to the *Pilot*, “Our friends, the good people of the North, could not be made to believe the tender sensibilities of John Bull were kept up to a high state of cultivation for no other purpose than to keep alive a hostile state of feeling in England towards the United States.” According to the author, England cares “no more for the slavery of the Negro in America than he does for the slavery of the miners in Cornwall or Wales.” An article entitled “National Matters,” warned of the dishonest nature of the British and their agenda. Reporting that the British ministry had decided to temporarily avoid aiding the Confederacy, the *Pilot* warned readers that they “must assume, as a matter of course, that England will take every advantage which the distracted condition of ours opens to her.”<sup>57</sup> Again, the paper played to its constituency by labeling the British as untrustworthy, scheming, and deceptive; to Irish eyes, this was the opposite of what America should be.

To many Irish, the war for Union was a war against the “resurrected spirit of the British aristocracy which had been laid out a corpse at the Revolution.” As a Wisconsin Irishman said, “This rebellion is England, but it is not England open armed, but England in her own masked, assassin, slimy, serpentine character.” England and the rebellion

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<sup>56</sup> *Pilot*, July 6, 1861; September 7, 1861.

<sup>57</sup> *Pilot*, June 1, 1861; June 8, 1861; June 22, 1861.

could be defeated by the Union. The *Record* printed the speech of Dr. Daniel Cahill to the Irish people, in which Cahill postulated that upon the outbreak of hostilities, France would join the South and England would join the North, with the end result being these “two European executioners” bleeding all the republican blood out of the United States.<sup>58</sup>

The most cherished American rights, such as the freedom of religion, were framed in the same manner. As Catholics in a largely Protestant country, the Irish cherished and celebrated American freedom of religion. Unsurprisingly, they often voiced their support for the First Amendment as it related to England: “Our Constitutions guarantee us here, what England denies to Ireland, liberty and equal rights in respect to religion.” The *Freeman’s Journal* also contrasted American freedom of religion with the situation across the Atlantic: “All the manoeuvres [sic] of European Governments to control freedom and to dictate creeds, have but caused more blood to flow, and more sacrileges to be committed. Here religion is free.”<sup>59</sup>

To the Irish, Americanism meant having a federal government deferential to the people whom it served; strict local control trumped all other considerations. The Irish opposed the majoritarian tyranny of big-government Republicans. To them, it seemed that one part of the country had decided to govern another part of the country, in “disregard of the...spirit” of the Constitution. Centralization was European, and thus, un-American. Centralized government “is the modern European idea,” which had made despotisms out of France, Austria, Italy, and Prussia. This centralized government threatened the American Union as well. The two main political schools were the

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<sup>58</sup> Grace McDonald, *History of the Irish in Wisconsin in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1954; New York City: Arno Press, 1976), 141; *Metropolitan Record*, February 16, 1861.

<sup>59</sup> *Pilot*, September 24, 1859; *Freeman’s Journal*, July 2, 1859.

Massachusetts School, which proposed “setting up a strong government over a weakened people,” and the “American idea” of keeping the government weak in comparison to a strong people.<sup>60</sup>

The Irish painted the British system of government as the opposite of the American system and implied in many cases that only one could survive. The *Freeman's Journal* directly compared the English and American Constitutions. When Thaddeus Stevens pushed a bill through without permitting debate, he cited precedents from the English Parliament. The *Freeman's Journal* rejected this, pointing out the irreconcilable differences between the two systems of government. While “the English have *no* written Constitution, we *have*,” and while “England is a consolidated Kingdom, we are a *Federation* of free and *sovereign* states.” In a speech by George F. Train printed in the *Irish-American*, one can easily see how the Irish viewed America and England to be polar opposites. “*The American rebellion is the world's rebellion*, and the life of America is the death of England,” said Train, who went on to point out that “America will live, England will die.” England's downfall had started when “the governing classes laid their plans for sapping away the liberties of the people,” leading to the rise of America and collapse of England. As O’Gorman said in his 1867 funeral oration for Thomas Francis Meagher, it was Britain that had been the true enemy of the American Republic. Britain had always been jealous of her revolted colonies and a re-united American Union was necessary as a check on the British.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, May 18, 1861.

<sup>61</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, December 20, 1862; George F. Train speech printed in *Irish-American*, August 23, 1862; Richard O’Gorman in Thomas Francis Meagher, *Speeches on the Legislative Independence of Ireland* (New York City: P.M. Haverty, 1869), xxii.

Captain David Power Conyngham (of the famed Irish Brigade) also contrasted America and its Constitution with the evil England at every opportunity. For example, Conyngham called an 1861 recruitment speech by Thomas Francis Meagher a “high eulogium on the greatness and justness of the American Constitution, and a powerful appeal to his countrymen to rise in defence [sic] of the flag which waved its protecting folds over them, when fleeing from the upas poison of England’s supremacy.”<sup>62</sup>

Peter Welsh linked American and Irish motives and objectives, which stood against British un-Americanism. Fighting for America was fighting for Ireland, and fighting for Britain was fighting against America. Welsh referred to any Irish soldier who enlisted in the British Army as “the utter contempt of his countrymen,” as those men would be fighting for “that prostitute of nations that amalgamation of hypocrisy [sic] base treachery and debauchery.” In contrast to that, Irishmen fighting in the Union Army did so because they and “their descendents have a claim a stake in the nation and an interest in its prosperity.” Welsh felt a duty to the “thousands of Irland’s [sic] brave sons” who “lay mouldering [sic] in the soil” of countless civil War battlefields, and he felt a future obligation to “coming generations and the oppressed of every nation for America was a common asylum for all.” It was a dual duty, to make sure the dead Irish-American soldiers had not died in vain and to preserve the republic which they had defended for all peoples. In his mind, Ireland owed America for taking in so many of her sons, saying “When we are fighting for America we are fighting in the interest of Irland [sic].” For Welsh, the chief beneficiaries of the collapse of the American Union would be the aristocrats and tyrants of Europe; all men who loved free government and liberty were watching closely. A soldier calling himself “Hibernia” wrote to the *Irish-American*

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<sup>62</sup> Conyngham, *The Irish Brigade and its Campaigns*, 49.

in June 1861 outlining his reasons for joining the 24<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania regiment. He claimed that the Irishmen in his regiment would “battle to the death in defence [sic] of that flag which has been a shield to them against the tyranny of bloody and tyrannical England.” The common enemy of Ireland, America, and freedom itself was England. According to Welsh, England hated America for being the refuge for Irish immigrants, for her naval power that was outstripping England’s, and for her republican liberty itself.<sup>63</sup>

The American Irish unsurprisingly rejected the *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* notions of citizenship as antithetical to the essence of America and deemed it English or Anglo-Saxon in nature. Americanism was a universal concept and American citizenship should be a choice for anyone. Bestowing that citizenship on someone because of a certain ethnicity or their geographic accident of birth was antithetical to the Irish conception of America. During the Civil War era, the American Irish contrasted their open idea of American citizenship with the narrow Anglo-Saxon view. In the view of the Irish, they were just as much Americans as anyone else. Ties between the two countries had been drastically exaggerated. In “A Celtic rebuke to ‘Anglo-Saxonism,’” printed in the *New York Irish-American*, the author charged British officials making speeches about the American Republic with exaggerating the “fraternity in blood, language, and religion” between the two countries. A British speech leaving out this glorification of Anglo-Saxonism in America would be like “the play of Hamlet with the part of the prince of Denmark left out.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Welsh to Patrick Prendergast (Margaret’s father, who lived in Ireland), June 1, 1863 in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 100-103; Welsh to his wife in Kohl, February 3, 1863, in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 65-66; “Hibernia” to *Irish-American*, June 30, 1861, printed July 6, 1861.

<sup>64</sup> *Irish-American*, June 20, 1857.

Many Irish found comparing America and England to be offensive. In response to an article found in the *New York Daily Tribune* arguing that Canada was as well governed as the United States, the *Irish-American* printed a rebuttal in which the paper called the *Tribune*'s opinions "very unrepublican and anything but American." The *Irish-American* leveled the accusation that "the English people, as a people, hate, and what is worse, despise America and Americans. They hate our democracy as much as they love their own Queen." England, "as a monarchy of despotism," did not belong in any comparison with the great republic. "There is, there can be, no cordiality of sentiment between America and England," said the *Irish-American*, for "Oil and water cannot mix. If American Republicanism goes ahead Monarchy must retrograde." English support for the Confederacy incensed many Irish Americans, including General Meagher, who used it as a recruiting tool. While enlisting volunteers as the commander of the Irish Brigade, Meagher often referenced England's "evil scheme" of helping the South destroy the great American Republic. Following the catastrophic Union defeat at Fredericksburg, Daniel MacNamara accused England of rejoicing at the downfall of democratic and republican institutions in America; the Southern cause had "monarchical friends across the Atlantic," he said.<sup>65</sup>

For the Irish, monarchy and royalty constituted the exact opposite of American republicanism. One has to look no further than the case of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York and its commander, Colonel Michael Corcoran, who refused to join the 1860 New York City parade honoring the Prince of Wales. This symbolizes how the American Irish intended to portray themselves as Americans. While Colonel Michael Corcoran made an

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<sup>65</sup> *Irish-American*, May 9, 1857; Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 84; MacNamara, *The History of the Ninth Regiment*, 269.

impassioned plea on behalf of his and his comrades' Irish ancestry, calls to disband the regiment still flooded in. Facing a court-martial for this decision, Corcoran received a flood of gifts from Irish Americans around the country. After the regiment decided to assist with the war effort, however, the court-martial was withdrawn. As the *Pilot* stated, the Irish boasted of their republicanism and their shunning of the Prince of Wales as being two sides of the same coin. They sought to leave no room for accusations of un-republican or un-American behavior. The British represented all that was un-republican and un-American; the Irish loathed everything British. The Irish desired that no one be able to say that the Irish had more homage for royalty than they did for American-style republicanism. As the most "virulent enemies to royalty in the country," the Irish could not show any deference to the Prince of Wales. Nevertheless, while the *Pilot* encouraged its readers not to forget the wrongs perpetrated upon their native land, it also reminded them that they were now citizens of a different country. In the end, the refusal to honor the Prince of Wales was labeled as insubordination.<sup>66</sup>

The American Irish also framed the debate over Irish independence in American terms and used the American case as the convenient analogy, an analogy made more effective with the use of some hyperbole. The *Boston Pilot* reported in May 1858 on the

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<sup>66</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 44-46; Phyllis Lane, "Colonel Michael Corcoran: Fighting Irishman," in *The History of the Irish Brigade*, ed. Pia Seija Seagrave, 21. Born in Ireland in 1827, Corcoran arrived in New York in 1849 and helped recruit to the Irish 69<sup>th</sup>. He was elected colonel and led the regiment at Bull Run, only to be captured and later exchanged. He later formed the Corcoran Legion and was a founder of the Fenian Brotherhood - see John L. Garland, "Michael Corcoran and the Formation of his Irish legion" in *Irish Sword* 17, no. 66(1987): 26-40. Corcoran spoke highly of America for all the opportunities it had provided for him but he was also proud of his heritage - "half my heart is Ireland's and half is America's," he wrote in the narrative of his time in Confederate imprisonment following his capture at the first battle of Bull Run (the anguish of which was worse than dying for one's country). Corcoran echoed the sentiments of other Irishmen by referring to his duty to 1776 and his belief that demagogues had duped the South into secession - see Michael Corcoran, *The Captivity of General Corcoran: The Only Authentic and Reliable Narrative of the Trials and Sufferings Endured during his Twelve Months Imprisonment in Richmond and Other Southern Cities* (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co., 1862), 22, 27-28, 40; *Pilot*, October 13, 1860; November 8, 1860.

*Cincinnati Times* and its editors decrying the fact that Irishmen in America were complaining about the British government and longing for the independence of their native isle. Asserting that the American colonies had thrown off their English oppressors having “never had a hundredth of the cause” that the Irish did, the *Pilot* stated that “No American can condemn the aspiration for national independence of Ireland without at the same time condemning the American Revolution.”<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

The Irish claimed to ascribe to a civic form of nationalism, a cosmopolitan brand of Americanism. Being an American was a choice that anyone could make. They had made the choice to become Americans, but there were significant elements in the Union that did not consider them as such. Many of these nativist factions accused the Irish of being un-American, an accusation seemingly substantiated by their Copperhead politics. The Irish turned the tables and accused the nativists of being un-American though. Nativist rejection of the American universalism supported by the Irish rendered these nativists and Republicans un-American.

They blamed the war on un-American political extremism. It had been secessionist and abolitionist demagogues who tricked the country into war. Since the Republicans were the party of abolition, the Irish attacked the Republicans and Lincoln as un-American. By doing so, they could carve out their own identity as the true heirs of Americanism while qualifying their dissent as patriotism. A foreign element in the eyes of so many Americans, the Irish sought to portray an image of national loyalty while vehemently protesting against a national war. They further justified these controversial

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<sup>67</sup> *Pilot*, May 1, 1858.

opinions by using their interpretation and memory of American history. Irish-American newspapers during the Civil War used statements by the Founding Fathers to justify their assaults on Lincoln and the Republicans. If they could get Thomas Jefferson and George Washington to agree with them, it would be exceedingly difficult to label them as subversive foreigners. The Irish used those great American statesmen and their statements as a propaganda campaign during the Civil War.

## CHAPTER IV – “GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS A ‘COPPERHEAD’”: THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE CIVIL WAR IRISH

### Introduction

During the Civil War era, Irish-American leaders fought for Irish acceptance into mainstream American society. In order to amalgamate, Irish-American editors and other leaders attested that Irish Catholics were especially American, that Americanism and Catholicism ideologically dovetailed. They pointed to the contributions of the Irish throughout American history, up to and including the Civil War itself. Irish leaders built their American patriotism around the notion that the country had served as a sanctuary for them; army recruiters used the message of duty to the American sanctuary as a means of attracting potential Irish-American soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The Irish wanted their people to serve in all-Irish units so as to visibly garner the respect and admiration of the American people at large, and they worried about other groups taking credit for what they had done. During and after the war, they thus formulated the myth of Irish-American courage as an ethnic trait during the war and preserved their own pristine memory of unfettered Irish-American wartime patriotism. Despite their contributions to the war effort, the Irish were often branded as disloyal due to their exceedingly anti-Republican and anti-war politics as the war progressed. To insulate themselves from these accusations of un-American and unpatriotic behavior, they used the words of the Founding Fathers to justify and sanction their seemingly radical and unpatriotic politics. In order to reconcile their anti-war and seemingly un-American politics with their desire to make inroads into

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Francis Meagher was notable for this – see Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 84.

mainstream American society, Irish Americans *used* American history to sanctify their viewpoints.

Various scholars have argued that the Civil War experience accelerated the Americanization process for the Irish, whereas this study contends that prominent Irish Americans participated in this process as well by using their conceptions of the un-American and their interpretation and memory of U.S. history. Irish-American contemporaries expressed that Irish Catholics, instead of being un-American as nativists charged, were actually *especially* suited to the rigors of American citizenship. They made passing references to contributions to the American Revolution, and they asserted that Irish fighting motivations had been primarily to preserve and bequeath the legacy of 1776. Their conceptions of American Unionism were closely related to their Anglophobia and the fixation with 1776, as they explained that they needed to protect the Union from the nefarious influence of the British. In exchange for all they had done, Irish leaders called for equal citizenship rights for adopted American citizens such as themselves. Irish leaders proclaimed America to be an Irish sanctuary that required protection. The Union had protected them in their hour of need, and they had returned the favor.

Irish leaders used their interpretation of American history to proclaim that they were more American than anyone else and to protect them from accusations of un-American behaviors and attitudes. Irish leaders noted that the Irish were inherently a freedom-loving people, who had attempted in 1798 to incite an American Revolution in Ireland. Irish leaders used the statements and rhetoric of select Founding Fathers to justify and defend their increasingly Copperhead politics during the Civil War. They

used the words and writings of Thomas Jefferson and applied them to contemporary politics. For example, Irish newspapers drew on Jefferson's Kentucky Resolutions to defend opposition to forcibly coercing the seceding states back into the Union.

These Irish leaders espoused hero-worship for George Washington, ad nauseum. They claimed that Washington did not fight only for American Protestants but that he had a special affinity for Irish Catholics in the American colonies and in Ireland. "Copperhead" was a derisive term, but the Irish would employ American history in using it to their advantage. They called Washington a Copperhead and compared his military record with that of their beloved General McClellan. They implied that Republicans were Tories and that the Loyalists of 1864 were no different than the Loyalists of 1776. Washington was a *rebel* and a *traitor*. The Irish claimed that in everything they did, they were carrying out Washington's preferences for the nation. In doing so, they claimed a special connection with what it meant to be a good and true American.

### **Irish Assert That Catholics are Especially American**

Irish editors implied that Americanism and Catholicism were compatible and that the church was the primary vehicle for Irish progress in America. They emphasized the universal nature of Catholicism, and they used U.S. history to defend their position. The *Freeman's Journal* in 1857 stated that "religion and patriotism go hand in hand," since the principles inherent in the U.S. Constitution and the interests of the American Union dovetailed with the principles of Catholicism. Catholics, by virtue of their religion, tended to support Unionism. "We make not the preposterous claim, that no Catholic can be a factionist or a promoter of schism," the *Freeman's Journal* admitted, but "we do

claim, and the analysis of reason and facts support the claim, that the Catholic genius and tendency is ever to seek and to promote human concord and *union*.” By its very name, Catholicism “declares that it is one same religion, for all peoples, and for every diversity of political institutions. It is *one* in all.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Freeman's Journal* used the unbreakable bonds of Christian marriage as a metaphor for the American Union. Marriage, like the Union, “is indissoluble except by the death of one of the parties.” Preventing the South from divorcing the North was “well worth a ten years’ bloody civil war, if we could only at the end of it, restore the Government as our fathers made it.” Catholicism was also republican in nature. In an 1854 speech in San Francisco, Meagher took on those who claimed that the Catholic religion and republicanism were incompatible. Rather, men who claimed this incompatibility had conflated the Catholic religion with European religious hegemony. As a result, American-style republicanism and Catholicism were not ideologically mutually-exclusive but rather conducive to one another.<sup>3</sup>

Irish Catholics consistently emphasized *their* role in establishing *their* American government. For example, Father William Corby blasted the bigotry found in the anti-Catholic press, saying that were it not for Catholics, freedom would not have existed. Corby asked, “Was it not a Catholic – Columbus – who discovered this country? Was it not Catholic Spain that encouraged him, and furnished him the means? Consult history. Wherein have the Catholic Church and the Catholic people in this country failed in patriotism? Tell me that!” Catholic nations throughout the world had supported the

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<sup>2</sup>Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 102, 108; *Freeman's Journal*, November 24, 1860. The *Freeman's Journal* boasted that its two main goals were to be “truly American and truly Catholic” – see Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975), 162.

<sup>3</sup>*Freeman's Journal*, November 3, 1860; Meagher in Lyons, *General Thomas Francis Meagher*, 273-275.

American bid for freedom during the Revolutionary War. In fact, without material support and soldiers from Catholic nations like Ireland, Poland, and France, the United States would have been defeated in the Revolutionary War and would remain a British colony. Corby used the story of Cornwallis's Yorktown surrender to bolster his argument. "Yes, wellnigh [sic] on every page of the history of the United States you find recorded the brave deeds of Irish Catholics, and Catholics of all nations, including American Catholics, who labored zealously in the cause of American liberty," said Corby. "Shame on bigots" for refusing to acknowledge that Catholics had committed themselves to establishing and preserving America's free institutions, and only when bigotry was eradicated could we call ourselves a free people, bound together by the most sacred ties that patriotic blood is able to cement."<sup>4</sup> Catholics had found America, and they would contribute to the greatness of the United States, most notably during the Revolutionary War.

### **The Irish and Their Contributions to American History**

Irish leaders often found themselves fighting an uphill battle over their historical loyalty to the United States. The collective public perceptions of Irish loyalty in America had been tainted by the San Patricios, or St. Patrick's Battalion, during the Mexican-American War. This group of largely Catholic (but not necessarily Irish) soldiers switched sides and fought in the Mexican Army during the war, largely due to material promises from the Mexican government. Nativists and the press cited the claims of their

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<sup>4</sup> William Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, 66-70. While his biographer notes that Columbus's tall frame, ruddy complexion, and red hair indicate the distinct possibility of "barbarian" (as opposed to "Latin") blood coursing through his veins, there is no proof of this. More importantly, Columbus always took pride in being a Genoese-born Catholic – see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Time, Inc., 1962), 5.

Irish leader, John Riley, who claimed that seventy percent of his men were Irish. At any rate, the vast majority of the five thousand Irish soldiers in the war had remained loyal to the United States, and they sought to educate the American public on this fact in the years leading up to 1861. The stain of disloyalty would tarnish their American credentials, especially during wartime. The Irish used American history to remove this stain.<sup>5</sup>

During the Civil War era, the American Irish claimed to have played a significant role in the Revolutionary War. Just as they had done during the Civil War, the American Irish had volunteered to fight for the patriotic cause. In doing so, they claimed that they had earned a level of acceptance into American society. These beliefs were illustrated by the response to an advertisement for “general work” that bore the qualifier that “no Irish need apply.” Facetiously inquiring as to “whether “General Work” is a major general or brigadier general,” the *Herald* pointed out that such a caveat was insulting to “that brave class who fought in the Revolutionary war for our National Independence, and who are even now lavish of their blood for the Union.” Disqualification for work should not include those nationalities that had done so much to bring about American independence and save the Union. Showcasing the depths that Irish-American morale had plunged to at the time, the article suggested that the draft commissioners should give full notice that “no Irish need apply.”<sup>6</sup>

The relationship of Irish Catholics to the American Revolution had been misrepresented, claimed many Irish papers. They connected Irish ethnicity with the meaning of the American Revolution. In fact, Irish Catholic papers in America would

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 36-37. In competition with other groups for American acceptance, the Irish emphasized their bravery and role in the American Revolution while downplaying their drinking habits and Democratic Party affiliation – see Ofele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 44.

<sup>6</sup> *Herald*, May 23, 1863.

declare any American hero with any type of Irish heritage as one of their own in an effort to show their patriotism. For example, these editors claimed Anglo-Irish and/or Ulster Presbyterians like Alexander Hamilton, Patrick Henry, Charles Thomson, and Richard Montgomery as “Irish” contributors to the American Republic, knowing full well the disingenuous nature of such statements.<sup>7</sup>

Irish leaders claimed that the Irish fought for a cherished American idealism during the Civil War. They asserted that their motives were to save the legacy of 1776 (which they had helped to create) and assure the perpetuation of freedom and republicanism so that others around the globe could also attain it. Conyngham recalled in his memoirs that the Irish fought for America because they had a responsibility, not unlike that of other Americans, to fight for the republic that Montgomery died to produce, that Irish signers of the Declaration of Independence meant to transmit, and to any Irishman who wished to make the United States the land of his adoption. The Irish had a responsibility to assure that the principle of self-government in America worked.<sup>8</sup>

The American Irish morphed the idealistic fighting motives of rebels in Ireland with those of the American Revolutionary patriots and Union soldiers of Irish-American descent. Much overlap existed, as the Irish had supported American independence and were still fighting for that legacy, which would hopefully one day extend across the Atlantic Ocean. For example, in a letter to the *Irish-American* on the death of Irish-American Captain John O’Connell Joyce (at Antietam), Irish soldier James B. Turner (aka “Gallowglass”) felt that Joyce was merely another in a long line of Irish-American

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<sup>7</sup> Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 139. Thomson was born in Gortead in northern Ireland in 1729; his ancestors had been part of the Scotch migration to Ulster – see Boyd Stanley Schlenther, *Charles Thomson: A Patriot’s Pursuit* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> Conyngham, *The Irish Brigade*, 60-61.

martyrs. He asserted that the majesty and grandeur of the great republic owed a tremendous deal to the Irish, who were not mercenaries but were great men fighting for higher principles of liberty and republicanism. The foundations of America “have been cemented by the blood and the brains of so many Celts from Ireland.” Turner implored both Young Ireland and Young America to learn about the contributions of Montgomery, Thomas Macdonough, and the Emmets (who fought for similar principles on either side of the Atlantic). In doing so, they “will have their opinions heightened, and shaded by the light shed from the graves of their own more immediate dead. And no grave of so young a man on this continent will emit tenderer [sic] or truer rays to guide you in life and death, than those which spring from that tomb in Calvary where they have laid John O’Connell Joyce.”<sup>9</sup>

This connection between Irish and American freedom had been present for some time. In 1853, Young Irelander (and founder of the Irish 69<sup>th</sup> regiment in New York) Michael Doheny gave a extended speech in New York City lauding the Irish and Irish-American military traditions. After this lengthy oration on the Irish struggle for liberty and great Irish battles, he concluded by reminding the audience that the Irish in the American colonies had assisted in establishing the United States. Twenty thousand Irish Americans were standing by today, ready to fight for “this land of freedom,” that they had helped establish, he claimed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph G. Bilby, “‘Gallowglass’ Reports on Antietam,” in “*My Sons Were Faithful and They Fought*”: *The Irish Brigade at Antietam, an Anthology*, ed. Joseph G. Bilby and Stephan D. O’Neill (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House Publishing, 1997), 45-47. Robert Emmet was an Irish republican and revolutionary, sympathetic to the American Revolution, who was put to death for treason for his role in the ill-fated Rising of 1803. For Emmet’s roles in the 1798 and 1803 uprisings, see Ruan O’Donnell, *Robert Emmet and the Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003) and Ruan O’Donnell, *Robert Emmet and the Rising of 1803* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Demeter, *Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 22-23. The Young Ireland movement was a nationalist group that seceded from Daniel O’Connell’s more moderate Repeal Association in the mid-1840’s (the main point of contention

Whenever an opportunity existed to tie the Irish to anything patriotic or particularly American, or to associate their critics with anyone or anything particularly unpatriotic or un-American, the Irish capitalized on the opportunity. As Francis R. Walsh has shown, little concerned the *Boston Pilot* more in its infancy than to prove Irish loyalty to the United States. A chief objective of the Irish was also to disprove the myth that only Anglo-Saxon labor and blood had helped forge and build the nation into prosperity. The *Pilot* claimed in 1860 that seventy-five percent of the railroads, canals, and turnpikes which had modernized the country and ushered it into prosperity had been built by the Irish.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps nothing was as important as staking out patriotism by celebrating the Irish brother-in-arms, all the while calling into question the patriotism of American nativists. In 1836, the *Pilot* had responded to an assertion by the nativist *Spirit of '76* questioning the loyalty of the Irish by claiming that all the foreign-born generals during the Revolutionary War had been Catholic and that these Catholics deserved a tremendous deal of credit for instructing the rag-tag masses on how to use their arms. The *Pilot* countered charges that the Irish were only loyal to the Pope by pointing out that Aaron Burr, Benedict Arnold, and the members of the treasonous Hartford Convention were not Catholic, yet they were the greatest villains in all of American history. When in 1845 the *Boston Evening Gazette* complained about Boston Common being overrun by foreigners,

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being Young Ireland's refusal to reject physical force as a method of achieving their objectives) and launched a pathetic attempt at an uprising in the ill-fated Rising of 1848. Prominent members included Doheny, John Mitchel, and Thomas Francis Meagher, all of whom would turn up in the United States and play a role in the American Civil War – see Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1987). Another less notable Young Irelander to fight in the American Civil War was James Huston, who died at Gettysburg – see Monsignor Patrick O'Flaherty, "James Huston, A Forgotten Irish-American Patriot," *Irish Sword* 11(1973): 39-47.

<sup>11</sup> Francis R. Walsh, "Who Spoke for Boston's Irish?" 24-25.

the Irish paper proudly asserted that the Common had actually been donated to the city by an Irish American.<sup>12</sup>

The Irish Catholic press in America often focused on the religious affiliation of those who had forged the American Republic. In calling for readers to celebrate those who had fought for the United States in war and contributed to the Constitution and American Union, the *Catholic Herald* proclaimed that “none have greater inducements to pray for the perpetuity of our Constitution and Union, of our political rights and of religious liberties, than American Catholics, the followers, in a Christian and patriotic line, of the venerable Archbishop Carroll, and of his cousin Charles Carroll of Carrollton.”<sup>13</sup>

Irish-American champions also used the words of America’s greatest heroes to praise themselves as American citizens. When George Washington’s son (George Washington Parke Custis) died, for example, the *Irish-American* called him “the old orator of Ireland” and focused on him as the link between the Irish people and the greatest American of them all. “Mr. Custis was an American, in the truest and noblest meaning of the word,” said the *Irish-American*, and “to Ireland, no friend was more disinterested and faithful.” Custis “was fond of mentioning how warmly esteemed the Irish-American revolutionary soldiers were by Washington; – and he was prompt in manifesting his own fervent regard for his Irish-American friends, their native land, and their Irish countrymen. The son of Washington and of Ireland, each by adoption, he was never untrue to the memory of the one or the interests of the other.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Francis R. Walsh, “Who Spoke for Boston’s Irish?” 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> *Catholic Herald*, July 7, 1860.

<sup>14</sup> *Irish-American*, October 24, 1857.

The Irish claimed they were owed equal American citizenship, on account of their contributions to the American Revolution. A letter to the *Irish-American* in March 1861 attacking the Two Years' Amendment illustrates this premise. "Massachusetts, the first State which raised the standard of rebellion against the atrocities committed by England has, by the passage of this bill, robed herself in the vestments of monarchy," read the letter. Since France, Ireland, Poland, Sweden, and Spain had been integral in the fighting successes of the American patriots, their peoples deserved the fruits of their ancestors' labors. "In the name of Lafayette, of Montgomery, of Kosciusce [sic], and of De Kalb, I protest against the 'Two Years' Amendment' law as unconstitutional and tyrannical, depriving the foreigner of his liberty." The Irish memorialized their fallen soldiers and emphasized their ideological commitment to their American values. In a February 1862 letter to the *Pilot*, Captain John W. Mahan of the Irish Ninth (Company D) wrote that the Irish "martyrs" who had died at Ball's Bluff and Roanoke "forcibly record proof that everywhere, fighting side by side with their brethren, "to the manor born," Irishmen have shown themselves not only worthy to have confided to them the honor of the American flag, but, also, forgetting the "Two Years' Amendment," forgetting the past prejudices and errors of Massachusetts, have in the heat of battle proudly borne aloft the banner of the old Bay State, and shed their blood in its defence [sic]."<sup>15</sup>

The Irish often proclaimed their motivations to fight as especially American in nature, in contrast to un-American nativism. "An Irish soldier" from the Mulligan regiment, who praised the *Pilot* as "unquestionably the representative Journal of the Irish-Americans," lauded the fighting motivations of Colonel John M. Oliver, who "fought for

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<sup>15</sup> "An Irishman" to the *Irish-American*, undated, printed March 16, 1861; Captain John W. Mahan to the *Pilot*, February 20, 1862, printed March 8, 1862. The Two Years' Amendment extended the waiting period for immigrants seeking to vote in state elections.

true Americanism, and fought well. Know Nothingism has had no more bitter foe, the Union no truer soldier, for when the cannon of rebellion bellowed forth in Charleston harbor, he went to the defense of the capital.” At a United Sons of Erin Dinner in the 1850s, William Robinson claimed that George Washington had favored Irish emigration during his times and that he had wished to confer “the name of American” for “adopted as well as native citizens.”<sup>16</sup> The Irish were fighting for a union that shunned nativist discrimination.

The Irish fused Unionism with antipathy towards they considered “English,” and they used American history to make this connection. The author of a *Pilot* editorial entitled “The Union: It Must be Preserved” veered into a discussion of England and her assaults on America. The British had been a bane in the American existence, in America’s fledgling years and beyond. “Did they not spread desolation wherever they could amongst us; and continue to do so,” asked the author, until “Andrew Jackson, an Irishman, who like another Hannibal, had vowed to be avenged of the enemy of his race, literally cut them to pieces at New Orleans?” After listing off a number of British atrocities from around the globe, the author concluded with a plea for Unionism so the United States could stand as an ideological counterbalance to Britain. “Let us hear no more of disunion. What if there are a few fanatics South as well as North. There are enough besides them to preserve the Union,” read the article, which went on to argue that the Irish would save the country if necessary, as they had in the past: “Jackson saved it in 1812 from the invader; his countrymen could and would save it to-day, even if not aided as they would be, by at least half a million Americans.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “An Irish Soldier” to the *Pilot*, March 12, 1862, printed March 29, 1862; Rohs, *Eccentric Nation*, 54.

<sup>17</sup> *Pilot*, January 7, 1860.

Irish leaders took any chance to publicize Irish support for the American Revolution and framed their Civil War service as protecting the Union from Great Britain. O’Gorman gave a speech in 1863 on the anniversary of Washington’s birthday in which he called for peace and praised Irishman Edmund Burke for his support of conciliation back in 1775. Nevertheless, the English government had ignored Burke and “drew the sword against the colonies.” Since the English were once again plotting to destroy the United States, the Irish would once again need to come to the great Republic’s rescue. At the 121<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Charitable Irish Society (or CIS) in Boston, the Honorable Caleb Cushing proclaimed that that the Irish in America would “conquer the enemies of the Union, American or European.” Irish Americans had been “fused together” by their service in the Revolutionary War on the side of the patriots.<sup>18</sup>

Irish-American leaders felt it necessary to confront those who were attacking their Americanism and questioning their contributions to the country’s history. The *Pilot* printed a speech of New Hampshire State Representative Cahill in October 1864 on the subject of Irish contributions to America. He claimed that the Irish had “given the Union, in this century, its greatest speculative, and its greatest practical statesmen” in John C. Calhoun and Andrew Jackson. Additionally, Cahill claimed as Irish two vice presidents, nine signers of the Declaration of Independence, six authors of the Constitution, ten major generals in the army, and six commodores in the navy. Irish labor had built America into a great and prosperous nation, so despite being poor themselves, the Irish were largely responsible for turning the United States into a rich nation. The *Pilot* bragged that Cahill had finally fought back against the nativists who were ignorant of the

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<sup>18</sup> Richard O’Gorman in *Pilot*, March 7, 1863; *Irish-American*, March 27, 1858.

“all-important services” that Catholics and Irish “have rendered from the dark hours of the revolution, through the long day of prosperity that followed, down to and through the dark and gloomy hours of the present.” The paper felt it important to report on Cahill’s speech, since it was not “often that we hear, anywhere, such a telling rebuke to the passion and intolerance of bigotry, or to the prevailing ignorance of the part Irishmen have taken all along our history.” These assertions were made by Irish Catholics in Irish Catholic newspapers. Since many of these “Irish” heroes were actually Scotch-Irish, many of these claims were misleading.<sup>19</sup>

Irish newspapers were perhaps fondest of celebrating the exploits of Irish-American military heroes. For example, in 1857 the *Irish-American* sang the praises of Commodore John Barry and quoted Washington’s stepson in his praise of Colonel John Fitzgerald. The *Pilot* celebrated the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans in 1859 by giving a full biography of the battle’s hero, Andrew Jackson. The piece made certain to include his father’s Irish ancestry as well as the fact that his brothers Hugh and Robert had been born in Ireland. The *Irish-American* also monitored the July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1859 celebrations in Ireland, when the celebration in Killarney included public readings of the Declaration of Independence and celebrations of the contributions of famous Irish

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<sup>19</sup> *Pilot*, October 1, 1864. John C. Calhoun’s father, Patrick, was born in County Donegal in the north of Ireland in 1727 and emigrated to Virginia (as part of the Scotch-Irish migration of the eighteenth century) when he was a young boy. The first generation of Calhouns settled near Wytheville, Virginia. Calhoun himself kept a lifetime interest in his family history and visited Wytheville at age sixty-four to “visit the ancient residence of our family” – see Irving H. Bartlett, *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 20. Andrew Jackson was also of Scotch-Irish ancestry. His parents, Andrew and Elizabeth Hutchinson Jackson, were Presbyterians from the north of Ireland who settled in a remote region along the border between North and South Carolina, where the future president was born (historians have been unable to determine on which side of this border this birth occurred) – see Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 8-9.

Americans like Robert Fulton, Samuel Morse (the famous nativist but grandson of an Irishman), and Presidents Buchanan, Polk, and Jackson.<sup>20</sup>

The *Irish-American* credited the Irish with proving their loyalty through their military glory and their role in American expansion. In addition to their contributions to victory in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 had developed the “genius and heroism of Jackson, as well as the skill and valor of McDonough.” And “When the anarchists of Mexico wantonly insulted our flag, trespassed on our rights, harassed and imprisoned our citizens on the frontiers,” it was “the Irish-American Polk [who] signally punished our enemies, humiliating their armies, and annexing to the United States the richest portion of their territories.” The Irish-American General Benjamin Franklin Butler had saved the capital by seizing Annapolis to begin the Civil War, and the famous 69<sup>th</sup> New York “eagerly responded to the earliest call of the Federal Executive and marched the largest number of patriotic citizens in any single organization to the post of danger.” These contributions had proved that the Irish were “invincibly loyal to the union.” Through these shows of military prowess, “It is thus [that] the Irish race in America proves, by its representatives, its loyalty to the union.” P.S. Devitt of the 31<sup>st</sup> New York volunteers pointed out that “the records of America’s struggle for independence identify Irishmen with the noble work of ’76, and with the subsequent work of 1812, and prove them to be a part of this great Republic” by helping humiliate “regal tyranny.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Saving the Union**

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<sup>20</sup> *Irish-American*, March 14, 1857; August 6, 1859; *Pilot*, January 8, 1859.

<sup>21</sup> *Irish-American*, July 6, 1861, brackets added; P.S. Devitt to *Irish-American*, November 12, 1862, printed November 29, 1862.

Marion Archer Truslow argued that the Irish became Americans by going through the pension process after the Civil War. They earned their citizenship by fighting in the war, as pensions went to “Union Army veterans” instead of Irish or Germans or blacks. The melting pot soldiers confirmed the Irish view of American patriotism and nationalism through the Civil War. Since American citizenship was “contractual, volitional, and legal,” American national identity was not an ethnic or biological but rather an ideological structure, a civic choice on the part of individuals. The bravery of the Irish Brigade during the Civil War gave the Irish everywhere a sense of American entitlement. Their “patriotism was actual now rather than incipient” as it had been prior to the courageous exploits of the Irish Brigade. Essentially, the war experience and contribution of soldiers negated their ethnic or racial backgrounds, at least in the eyes of the state. This affirmed what many Irish leaders had been asserting for some time in regards to American acceptance and citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

A good example of this newfound American acceptance took place in the notoriously nativist state of Massachusetts, the hotbed of mid-nineteenth century Know-Nothingism. The Civil War saw Massachusetts cheering on its Irish citizens as opposed to denigrating them. The Irish thus earned a degree of respect and forged their way into American society. They hoped that the true meaning of liberty and democracy had changed as a result, with antebellum nativism giving way to a more accepting native American populace. According to Phillip Thomas Tucker, the Irish fought for inclusion

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<sup>22</sup> Marion Archer Truslow, “Peasants into Patriots: The New York Irish Brigades and their Families in the Civil War Era, 1850-1890” (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1994), 1-7, 37, 98.

into American society in the Civil War. They fought on behalf of a new land, a new country that would not shun and oppress them as England had for so long.<sup>23</sup>

The American Irish used the Irish ethnicity of certain Union generals to demonstrate their contributions to America. For example, the Irish-American Record of Patriotism in the July 18, 1863 issue of the *Pilot* lauded the heroism of General George Meade, whose ancestors hailed from Ireland. “A week ago, masses of weak-kneed “true Americans” were as blue as indigo, with “fear and trembling,” in view of the awful peril of the Republic,” read the piece. In previous eras, those so-called “true Americans” would have cried out “Put none but Americans on guard” in light of such peril. Meade, however, had earned Irish Catholics a level of American acceptance through his great victory at Gettysburg. “To-day their anxiety is at an end,” claimed the *Pilot*, due to the “grandson of a naturalized Catholic emigrant from Ireland.”<sup>24</sup>

Early recruiting speeches by men such as Thomas Francis Meagher played on the crowds’ sentimentality for American Revolutionary ideals, combining them with the principles for which the Irish fought in the Civil War. On August 29, 1861, an estimated 75,000 people gathered in Jones Wood on New York’s east side to raise money for the widows and families of those lost at Bull Run. That afternoon, Meagher delivered a speech in which he proclaimed that the dead Irish soldiers had sealed “their oath of American citizenship with their blood.” On the question of whether the Union war effort was indeed a just one, Meagher answered in the affirmative, explaining that the Union

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<sup>23</sup> Lord, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 718; Phillip Thomas Tucker, “Introduction: Celtic Warriors in Blue,” in *The History of the Irish Brigade*, ed. Pia Seija Seagrave, 2-3. Thomas H. O’Connor agreed, arguing that the pain and anguish that Irish Americans experienced during the Civil War served to Americanize them. Generally speaking, they got better jobs following the war and even developed a gentler attitude toward blacks – see Thomas H. O’Connor, *Civil War Boston*, 237-239.

<sup>24</sup> *Pilot*, July 18, 1863.

war effort was designed to protect the legacy and “most precious fruits” of 1776. The very sanctity of American democracy was at stake in the Civil War, and nothing could be of greater urgency.<sup>25</sup>

Patrick Henry O’Rorke provides a good example of an Irish-American soldier who acquired his American acceptance as a result of fighting in the Civil War. O’Rorke was an Irish immigrant who graduated at the top of his West Point class and died at age twenty-seven at Gettysburg. His short but stellar career left a lasting impression. In 1877, a former West Point instructor and Civil War comrade of O’Rorke recalled that he was “a man of noble character, and had nothing of the wild Irishman about him.” Those around him found him approachable and usually called him “Pat.” According to Donald M. Fisher, “his daily association and friendships with men of Anglo-American backgrounds from all states of the Union allowed for the process of assimilation and created a sense of his being an “American.” He commanded the 140<sup>th</sup> New York, after all, which consisted primarily of middle class, Protestant men. This allowed him to prove himself to contemporaries. He became a hero to the people of Rochester because of his battlefield heroics, and the GAR named its second post in the country after him in 1866. O’Rorke embodied the opportunity available to Irish-American soldiers in the Civil War. Ethnic groups like the Irish romanticized and mythologized the lives of these war heroes to gain acceptance as Americans.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Demeter, *Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 68-69.

<sup>26</sup> Donald M. Fisher, “Born in Ireland, Killed at Gettysburg: The Life, Death, and Legacy of Patrick Henry O’Rorke,” *Civil War History* 39 (1993): 231, 236-239. See also Brian A. Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe: A Regimental History of Patrick O’Rorke’s 140<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry* (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, Inc., 1999) and Brian A. Bennett, *The Beau Ideal of a Soldier and a Gentleman: The Life of Colonel Patrick Henry O’Rorke from Ireland to Gettysburg* (Wheatland, NY: Triphammer Publishing, 1996).

The *Pilot* contended in July 1865 that the war service of the Irish had put them on equal national footing with native-born Americans. The Irish felt the same as the ancestors of the native-born Americans had; the war had leveled the playing field of American citizenship. Since the Irish had helped restore the Union and Constitution in this second war for American independence, they had earned American citizenship. “We all, native born, or foreign born, who have fought in this war, have fought for a common country, and, in the next generation, our descendants who shall then read the glowing history of these wonderful days, will be Americans all, Americans in birth, in heart, and in their aspirations for the country,” read the editorial. The author testified that by the war’s end, “The work of assimilation will have performed its perfect mission, and when they read with flushed cheeks and beating hearts, and quickened [sic] circulation, of the heroic deeds of this heroic age, they can say with proud consciousness, ‘we, too, are Americans, and our fathers bled and died to establish this beloved country!’”<sup>27</sup>

The Irish considered the wars of 1776, 1812, and 1861 all struggles for American idealism, set against British tyranny. In doing so, the Irish were anxious to goad Britain into the war itself. Perturbed by a writer in the London *Morning Post* asserting that the American Irish blindly followed only their geographic location in selecting a side in the Civil War, the *Record* used American history to combat this “libeler.” Rather, “The Irish in America many substantial, living, resolute, and high-souled pledges of their devotion to the flag of our adopted country, as well as of their grief on account of the dark clouds which have gathered around its hitherto resplendent folds,” said the *Record* in regards to how the “Irish heart never wavered in its fealty to the independence of America” during the 1776 and 1812 conflicts. “It is the same in 1861; and let but England once exhibit her

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<sup>27</sup> *Pilot*, July 15, 1865.

cloven foot plainly in this war and she will soon find, by her utter defeat, whether Irishmen have fled from the union in any great number.”<sup>28</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, many Irish periodicals claimed that the rabidly nationalist Fenians were carrying forth the legacy of the American Revolution. The *Pilot* compared the nascent Fenian movement of the post-war era to the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty had “excited the most unbounded mirth in the realms of George the Third,” while the Fenian movement “in its weakness, in its incipiency, has caused the Throne of England to tremble.” The *Pilot* claimed that while the American Revolution had encouraged Ireland to declare itself an independent kingdom, the Southern rebellion would have an even larger effect on the Green Isle. This time, they could use their pent-up frustrations and their military service in an “Irish-American expedition” for freedom back home.<sup>29</sup>

While labeled as an extremist Irish nationalist organization, the Fenians claimed that they were actually a cosmopolitan movement fighting for Irish freedom modeled on American standards and principles. Fenian Brotherhood Circular No. 17 instructed readers that the Fenian Brotherhood’s guiding principle was to use any and all foreign assistance available. Any Irish organization intending to free Ireland without foreign aid or any American organization aiming to free Ireland on its own were not to be considered Fenian, as “cooperation between the Irish in America and the Irish in Ireland is the essence of Fenianism.” The Fenians even modeled their Constitution on the American one, and asked members to fight for the same principles for which the Founding Fathers had. The Fenian Constitution sounded much like the American one. Its Preamble read

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<sup>28</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, June 8, 1861.

<sup>29</sup> *Pilot*, January 13, 1866; August 6, 1861.

“We, the Fenians of America, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, and secure the blessings of liberty for the Irish race in Ireland, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Fenian Brotherhood of America.”<sup>30</sup>

### **America as an Irish Sanctuary**

To the Civil War Irish, America was a sanctuary and a symbol of freedom that had to be preserved in hopes it would serve as an example for others to follow. Recruiting posters for the Irish Ninth often called for “Irishman to the rescue,” as the “Union and future glory of this great sanctuary of freedom is in danger.” Charles Halpine’s 1868 poem “On Raising a Monument to the Irish Legion” celebrated Irish bravery in the war effort and can be summed up by the line: “No wish but to preserve the state/ That welcomes all th’ oppressed of earth.” The poem honored those Irish-American soldiers who, “Thinned out by death, they would not yield – It was the world’s last hope to them.” A letter from Redmond Sheridan of the 90<sup>th</sup> Illinois, printed as the Irish-American Record of Patriotism for October 17, 1863, pronounced that the Irish-American struggle for “the perpetuity of Republican institutions” was aimed at the combined forces of “the despots of Europe and the misguided people of the South.” Even

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<sup>30</sup> Fenian Brotherhood Circular No. 17, April 12, 1870; Fenian Brotherhood Circulars, Folder 21, Box 1, George Cahill Papers, Burns Library, Boston College; Constitution of the Fenian Brotherhood, Fenian Brotherhood Papers, Box 1, Missouri State Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri. According to Mitchell Snay, Fenian national identity rested upon the belief that a separate Irish nation was a restoration rather than a creation. Ireland had once been a great nation, but it had been destroyed by England. Echoing Thomas Paine, the Fenians claimed that destroying the English monarchy was a necessary precondition for Irish independence. In making these points, they relied heavily upon the rhetoric of the Revolutionary and Early Republic eras in the United States – see Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen and Southern Whites*, 129, 151-152. Likewise, Whigs during the American Revolution had used the Irish situation for propaganda purposes – see Brian Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American Relations during Reconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 4.

if unsuccessful in forging a new nation, those forces would still “destroy the last hope of aspiring oppressed nationalities struggling to break their chains to the Old World.”<sup>31</sup>

When Colonel Corcoran returned to New York City in August 1862, Fenian founder John O’Mahony concluded that he was very proud of the Irish fighting for the Union and that he hoped they would continue until “the American Republic is again restored as it has been, and until it stands forth as the beacon light of liberty throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup> Meagher reminded his audience in a July 1862 recruiting speech that America had provided for them a “shelter, a home, a tower of impregnable security” and referenced the great honors achieved by Irishmen like Richard Montgomery, Andrew Jackson, Michael Corcoran, and James Shields.<sup>33</sup> He implored the Irish to sign up for the Union Army on the basis that they owed the Union for its protection of them. Meagher asked for “one more effort, magnanimous and chivalrous for the Republic, which to the thousands and thousands of you, has been a tower of impregnable security.” Other Irishmen noticed Meagher’s success and called on other Irish military heroes, such as Colonel James A. Mulligan, to do the same. William M. Cassidy wrote to Mulligan to inform him of the successes experienced by Meagher recruiting in New York City and offering him \$1000 for a 12-lecture recruiting tour to stir “up the patriotism of the people, especially of our own countrymen.” Another letter from New York City asking Mulligan to hit the recruiting trail informed Mulligan that if he desired, any financial compensation

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<sup>31</sup> Ofele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 45; Charles G. Halpine, “On Raising a Monument to the Irish Legion,” in *Demeter, Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 56-57; Redmond Sheridan to the *Pilot’s* “Records of Irish-American Patriotism” section, printed October 17, 1863.

<sup>32</sup> John O’Mahony quoted in *Demeter, Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> *Demeter, Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 88.

he received for doing so could go to “any charity or purpose of patriotism which you may nominate.”<sup>34</sup>

Irish leaders often contrasted the American form of government to those back in Europe, and they emphasized the need for American republicanism to set an example for the world. Meagher had long admired the American way. In a May 1847 speech entitled “American Benevolence – Irish Gratitude” in Ireland, the youthful Thomas Francis Meagher exclaimed that America had proven that a free people could benefit the people of the world. Had it not been for the American Revolution, the Americans could not have helped the Irish people out with material aid during the Great Famine. As a result of such assistance, the Americans had shown their solidarity with the plight of the Irish. Meagher dismissed the notion that England was America’s sister nation and instead bestowed that honor upon Ireland. Meagher touted American Exceptionalism as early as the 1850s. He espoused American Exceptionalism at a banquet for John Mitchel, for example, as American-style republicanism was antithetical to European kings, aristocrats, and despotisms. The *Pilot* even advocated for the annexation of Ireland to America in 1865.<sup>35</sup>

Peter Welsh echoed these sentiments. He never lost faith in the Union war effort, explaining to his wife that even after the disastrous Union defeat at Fredericksburg, it was his duty to “sustain for the present and to perpetuate for the benefit of the future generations a government and a national asylum which is superior to any the world has yet known.” Welsh indicated that the Ireland owed America for all that America had done to take in her oppressed exiles through the years. He noted that the Irish had died in

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<sup>34</sup> Meagher quoted in Bruce, *Harp and Eagle*, 105-106; William M. Cassidy to Colonel James A. Mulligan, December 5, 1861; New York City Irishmen to Mulligan, December 14, 1861, Folder 7 (Letters, December 1861-January 1862), Box 1, James A. Mulligan Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

<sup>35</sup> Meagher, *Speeches on the Legislative Independence of Ireland*, 141-143; Lyons, *General Thomas Francis Meagher*, 234-239; *Pilot*, April 29, 1865; November 11, 1865.

service of America in all the country's wars, especially the Revolutionary War, but still felt that Ireland owed the United States for absorbing generations of Irish immigrants. He also noted that "If Ireland is ever free the means to accomplish it must come from the shores of America." The fates of the two countries' freedom depended on one another.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Welsh sought for what he saw as American egalitarian principles to be applied to Irishmen, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. He fought for the future of the Irish people, wherever they lived. Captain Conyngham fought for an egalitarian ideology as well. Conyngham stated that "The Irish felt that not only was the safety of the great [American] Republic, the home of their exiled race, at stake, but also, that the great principles of democracy were at issue with the aristocratic doctrines of monarchism [and] Should the latter prevail, there was no longer any hope for the struggling nationalists of the Old World." An Irish soldier in the 17<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin regiment summed up how many Irish were fighting for the legacy of 1776. In a February 27, 1862 letter, the Irishman outlined his reasoning: "First, to hand down to posterity the Government and the Constitution as the heroes of the Revolution left them to us; and them, with all the vengeance that heroes can feel, we will crush for ever the power of our foe, and free our loved island, and see an Irish Congress ruling the destinies of a free Irish people."<sup>37</sup> To secure and maintain this, the Union must remain intact.

Irish Americans equated Unionism and the legacy of the American Revolution; if the disunionist enemies of America won out, the work of the Founding Fathers and its possible extension elsewhere would be destroyed. The *Pilot* recognized that "the public

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<sup>36</sup> Welsh to his wife (in early 1863) quoted in Kohl, *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 2; Welsh to Patrick Prendergast (his father-in-law), June 1, 1863 in *Irish Green and Union Blue*, 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> Tucker, "God Help the Irish!", 173. Tucker's argument is that Irish soldiers mirrored the beliefs and values of Ireland over those of the United States, despite these competing loyalties – see Tucker, "God Help the Irish!" 18-19; F.A.H. (17<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin) to the *Pilot*, February 27, 1862, printed March 15, 1862.

pulse is in generous excitement” as the Independence Day approached in 1861. “A penetrating sense of danger to what we cherish most” bore down on Irish-American Unionism, which could be summed up as “A splendid devotion to the ever-grand achievement of 1776; a sublime spirit of attachment to the principles established and transmitted to us by patriots and heroes of that immortal period, a temper of proud refusal to be robbed of what cost so much blood to accomplish, a chivalrous desire to perpetuate that which has won for America the envy of the rest of the world; and a glowing determination to suffer extermination rather than yield to the enemies of the Union.” Irish-American leaders claimed they knew the true meaning of the Constitution; their war was one for the Constitution, which the Confederacy sought to destroy. In a recruiting speech, Judge Daly invoked American history in explaining the rightness of the Union cause over the Confederate one. The Articles of Confederation had been a terrible failure, he said, as they perpetuated the country as “a cluster of nationalities and not a nation.” With the adoption of the Constitution came nationhood, which combined with three hundred years of emigration, led to a “powerful nation under the government of democratic institutions.” A Confederate victory would destroy this.<sup>38</sup>

The *Pilot* claimed that the Irish were inherently a democratic people, principally suited for the demands of republican virtue. The British kings had soured them on the idea of royalty throughout the centuries, and the Irish rebellion of 1798 was “a terrific explosion of long smothered hate of the people for monarchy.” In the British colonies, the Irish were democratic and “in the United States they are the foremost champions of the Republic.” The Irish no longer had any affinity for monarchism, which stood in contrast to the belief of the Europeans, who thought that the Irish would generally side

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<sup>38</sup> *Pilot*, June 29, 1861; Truslow, “Peasants into Patriots,” 90.

with the Confederacy: “Our answer is: the preceding remarks prove *that the Irish are no longer Celts so far as political rule is concerned.*” Although Confederate conscription had forced some of them into service, “the Irish in the Southern cities are loyal to the republic; and the Irish in the rebel army are there by compulsion. About the Irish in the North nothing need be said. They have given the grandest proofs of their republicanism.”<sup>39</sup>

Fighting for the legacy of 1776 held a great deal of meaning for the Irish still in Ireland too. A letter writer to the *Irish-American* in July 1858 expressed Irish-American frustrations as another (American) Independence Day passed with Ireland still in shackles. “While we rejoice with the rejoicing, and chorus in the National Anthem, does not the ghost of famine stricken and oppressed Ireland rise up before the mental vision of every exile. When shall she have a new birthday?” Dennis Lyons, Chairman of the Association of the Sons of the Emerald Isle in San Francisco, called for national self-determination for Ireland on the occasion of St. Patrick’s Day in 1857. The Irish had taken refuge under the flag of the United States and its free government, which was what they wanted in Ireland. “We have solemnly sworn to support her Constitution and maintain her national integrity, and I am proud to say that the pages of her history bear conclusive evidence that our countrymen never proved recreant to their obligations.”<sup>40</sup>

### **American History to Legitimize Copperhead Politics**

During the Civil War, the American Irish used American history to their political benefit. They claimed a political affinity with the Founding Fathers and promoted this

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<sup>39</sup> *Pilot*, May 17, 1862.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Boston to the *Irish-American*, July 9, 1858, printed July 17, 1858; Dennis Lyons’ speech reprinted (from the *San Francisco Herald*) in the *Irish-American*, April 25, 1857.

special connection as evidence of their patriotism. They used Revolutionary rhetoric to make their political points, especially when these points undermined the Republican war effort. If the American Irish could get George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton to make their case for them, it would be more difficult to paint them as a subversive foreign element during this time of war.

The Irish used the American Revolution to claim that nativists were on the wrong side of history. A letter to the *Irish-American* in August 1858 blasted the apparently nativist editor of the *Express* that no “true American” would ever “proscribe a man because he was a Catholic.” “Let me ask you,” queried the author, “ye spirits of the men who fought and died for the country, who left your happy homes voluntarily to fight the common foe, who actually starved sooner than be found wanting when liberty was at stake, did ye suffer all this to make America a *Protestant* country? Did you, immortal Washington, whose only aim was “Liberty or death,” suffer this to make America a *Protestant* country? Me thinks [sic] the spirits of the departed dead reply in a thundering voice – ‘No, it was a common cause: all joined, let all share equally in its benefits.’”<sup>41</sup>

The Irish-American press celebrated the Irish as early champions of religious liberty. The *Freeman's Journal* printed a letter originally written to the *Milwaukee Daily News* on what the *Freeman's Journal* called the “preposterous pretension of Puritanism either to have *helped* to originate, or to have *accepted*, ‘American Ideas.’” The author recognized the Irish and other Catholics for their contributions to fundamentally American ideas. Crediting the Catholics in Maryland, the Episcopalians in Virginia, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, and the Dutch in New York with aiding the establishment of religious liberty in America, they blasted the Puritans for their intolerance and claimed

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<sup>41</sup> “Privateer” to *Irish-American*, August 12, 1858, printed August 21, 1858.

that as a result, they did not deserve “our toleration, nor our separation of church and state. I am not aware that we owe them *any* of our American ideas. The most restricted suffrage exercised was in Puritan Massachusetts. The narrowest and most illiberal repression of opinion has been there.” They rejected toleration and established a theocracy upon their arrival in Massachusetts. “They, and only they, came to this country with ideas, which our American life has swept utterly away. The notions every American condemns, the practices every American instinctively abhors, are all Puritan notions and Puritan practices, and came over in the Mayflower.” The Puritans held their own while they could, but “America belonged to the world, not to a narrow sect of religionists.”<sup>42</sup>

The Irish claimed that their enemies in America were the forces of disunion. They continued to be stalwarts of the truest American way. As the specter of sectionalism ripped the union in two, the Irish used American history to proclaim themselves above the fray. In a February 1860 *Pilot* editorial entitled “The Union: Its Enemies, Imaginary and Real,” the author claimed that “Time has vindicated the Irish in this country. Ask any candid, thinking American, let his politics be what they may and he will admit that no people have been more wronged than our fellow-countrymen.” After all, the Irish had done so much “for the country – how they fought in 1812 against the British invader, and again in Mexico for the American invader – performing the lion’s share of prodigies of valor in each case.” The Irish had consistently done their part, yet they were still perceived to be un-American or disloyal. The *Pilot* asked, “What would a Chinese or Persian traveler in this country say, for example, in his diary, if informed that the very people who had thus freely shed their blood in defense of their adopted country

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<sup>42</sup> Letter to the *Milwaukee Daily News*, reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal*, February 14, 1863.

and its institutions, were all the time meditating the ruin of the natives? What could be more absurd?”<sup>43</sup>

The Union that the Irish had helped forge was under attack. According to the press, fanatics both in the North, South, and England, who hated the Irish and sought to widen the breach between North and South were the real culprits. “No class of citizens have [sic] been truer to the rights of the South than the Irish,” said the *Pilot*. “The Fire-Eaters of the South, are not a whit more liberal than the fanatics of the North. Both are alike obnoxious as Mr. Douglas has declared.” The abolitionist press, subsidized from London, was the biggest threat to the Irish and to the Union. The *Pilot* reframed the contours of this debate by charging their opponents with disloyal and un-American behavior. “The real enemies of the Union are the very parties who were most unscrupulous in charging the Irish with treason against their adopted country,” charged the paper. The American people “know that if “foreign influence” has been at work against the union, it comes not from Ireland, but from Ireland’s oppressor.” The *London Times* had contributed large sums of money “from the secret service fund towards widening the breach as much as possible between the North and the South.” The London press was also bankrolling American abolition publications such as the *Anti-Slavery Standard* in an attempt to force American disunion. “Thus the real enemies of the Union are precisely those who are most disposed to give to petty spite against the Irish.”<sup>44</sup>

The *Catholic Herald* used Thomas Jefferson to argue in favor of a peaceful resolution to the sectional conflict. When the government ceased to follow the Constitution and violated the principles laid out in the Declaration of Independence, only

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<sup>43</sup> *Pilot*, February 18, 1860.

<sup>44</sup> *Pilot*, January 21, 1860; September 22, 1860; February 18, 1860.

then could a state resort to revolution. The appropriate initial response would be to nullify the law under the auspices of Jefferson's 1798 Kentucky Resolution, as "we prefer every other resort before that of revolution." The *Herald* advocated Jeffersonian concessionism run by "peaceful secessionists" who hoped to avoid hostilities. "By the *people* pursuing this course, the Revolutionists and Firebrands, religious and political, on either side of Mason and Dixon's line, may be assured that *they* will be compelled, by the determination of the *peaceful secessionists*, to submit to be *concessionists* [sic], in the most patriotic sense of the word, as Mr. Jefferson was, when he found the Union to be in danger," proclaimed the *Herald*. The Irish used Jefferson as their spokesman for peace so as not to appear disloyal. According to the editorial, the author of the Declaration of Independence "was indeed the author of *nullification* and the advocate of *secession*, in the last resort; but when his own doctrine of nullification was resorted to by another party of secessionists, he, when in power, became a *concessionist* [sic], and that, as far as we now, without the least idea of fighting any of the then refractory States to remain in the Union!"<sup>45</sup>

The *Record* used the Founding Fathers to make their point about strict constructionism and military coercion. "*We defy anyone to prove to us, either from the Constitution, or from the writings of the great statesmen of the Revolution, that there is any authority for bringing back by military force any seceding states,*" asserted the

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<sup>45</sup> *Catholic Herald*, November 24, 1860; December 1, 1860. In a dated but worthwhile political assessment of Jefferson's Kentucky resolutions and their role in nineteenth-century American politics (particularly the principle of nullification and the secession crisis) Ethelbert Dudley Warfield argued that the message of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions provided the Hartford Convention, South Carolinian nullifiers, and seceding states in 1860-1861 their political *raison d'être*. In addition, Dudley argued that John Breckenridge, grandfather of John C. Breckenridge, shared equally in crafting and sculpting the Kentucky Resolutions. His grandson's 1860 candidacy for president, of course, further solidified his political legacy – see Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, *The Kentucky Resolutions of 1798: An Historical Study* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 1-21.

*Record*. Again quoting Alexander Hamilton (“a man who loved his country”) as saying that “it must be utterly repugnant to this Constitution to subvert the State Governments” (“one of the maddest projects ever devised”) as it would cause a civil war, the *Record* claimed that peace would bring an alliance between North and South against the threats from foreign powers, which would “eventually lead to a more permanent Union than that which the abolitionists have destroyed.” The *Record* also employed the words of James Madison, who felt that coercing a state back into the Union “would be rightly considered a dissolution of the previous compacts by which it might be bound.” The *Record* went on to quote him as saying that “fire and water, are not more incompatible than such a strange mixture of civil liberty and military execution.” Is “the English language capable of stronger expression than this?” asked the author, who went on to join Madison in mocking the prospects of a militia marching from state to state to force them back into the Union against their will. “With the clear perception of a great statesman, Madison foresaw the results of the policy of coercion, and warned his countrymen against employing it as a means of preserving the Union,” read the piece, claiming that Madison’s “foresight is so remarkable that one would imagine he was writing subsequent to the events instead of prophecying [sic] in regard to them three quarters of a century before their occurrence.” The *Freeman’s Journal* joined the *Record* in quoting Madison and Hamilton in justifying their states’ rights view of the Constitution. Madison was a states’ rights Virginian, and it was his school of thought “in which we were brought up.”<sup>46</sup>

The Irish pleaded that the only way to save the Union was a return to the principles of Thomas Jefferson. By opposing the Republicans and standing up for

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<sup>46</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, April 25, 1863; May 9, 1863; *Freeman’s Journal*, March 7, 1863.

Jeffersonian politics, the *Freeman's Journal* claimed that they were working to “save Democracy, because, in the American sense of Democracy – Jeffersonian Democracy – it is but another name for *free* government – for *local self-government*.” These principles had won out over “monstrous centralism, which is despotism – stand well drawn out, as regards our American Constitutions of government, in the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 – drafted by the hand of Thomas Jefferson!” These resolutions had “saved” the Union in 1801 when the American people elected Jefferson, and they sustained it for the next sixty years. Returning to those principles was the only “way of hope to restoring fellowship between the disrupted States.” It was “the stout and gallant opposition of Jefferson and his school to the despotic tendencies of Adams and the Puritans, that peacefully re-established in the year 1800, the doctrines of Independence asserted in 1776, and, triumphing, gave a new lease of prosperity and concord to the Union of the American States,” said the *Freeman's Journal*. Nevertheless, the paper defended the New England states for resisting Jefferson's embargo in the latter stages of his presidency; they helped keep states' rights alive, as did the southern states that rejected the Tariff of 1828.<sup>47</sup>

After the Deep South states began to secede, Irish papers claimed that they only had entertained the idea of “concessionism [sic]” in preference to warfare and bloodshed. To shield themselves from accusations of disloyalty on account of being a foreign element undermining the Union war effort, they borrowed from the Founding Fathers. “We deny, moreover, and most positively, that we have ever advocated secession, or spoken of it, or alluded to it, except as a last resort,” said the *Herald* in reference to the South seceding, “and then only in preference to absolute revolution, civil war, bloodshed, military despotism, consolidation, and, finally, any attempt to annihilate the popular

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<sup>47</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, January 9, 1864; May 28, 1864.

governments of the United States of America.”<sup>48</sup> In short, secession was preferable only to strong-armed coercion.

The *Record* professed that under the Constitution, no power of coercion existed except for the Judiciary, which could coerce individuals, not states. Under a Union of consent, the consent of the governed was the *raison d'être* for the government. “When a community of freemen seek [sic] by force of arms to impose their form of government on a people who are unwilling to receive it, they become false to the rights of self-government and betray their own liberties,” states the Declaration of Principles for the Peace Men of their Country in the *Record*. The Founding Fathers “deliberately, advisedly and intentionally withheld from the general government all right to use force against any State, or against the people thereof, except on the application of such State.” To reinforce these assertions, a slate of quotes from Madison, Hamilton, and other Founders followed.<sup>49</sup>

In an 1864 address to Democrats in New York, O’Gorman quoted a famous founder in saying “The use of an armed force against a disobedient State, or States, would look more like a declaration of war than an infliction of punishment, and would be rightly considered a dissolution of the previous compacts by which it might be bound.” He followed up his quotation by asking “Who is it says that? Is he a Copperhead? Why, these are the words of Madison.” Judge Daly concluded by denouncing the idea of coercion as a means of governing: “Can any reasonable man be well-disposed toward a Government that makes war and carnage the only means of supporting itself – a

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<sup>48</sup> *Catholic Herald*, February 16, 1861.

<sup>49</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, August 27, 1864.

Government that can exist only by the sword? Every such war must involve the innocent with the guilty.”<sup>50</sup>

The Irish had a particular penchant for employing George Washington as their political spokesman to make their specific political arguments. During the secession crisis when many in Massachusetts were howling for military action, the Irish stubbornly clung to their constitutional Unionism and opposition to coercion. The *Pilot* quoted Washington in a letter he wrote to his friend, Virginia Congressman Col. Henry Lee, on Shays’ Rebellion. Washington urged moderation in dealing with the Massachusetts rebels. He advocated listening to the grievances of the rebels and then working on a constitution instead of a military solution to the problem, as “Influence is not government.” According to Washington, reasoned the *Pilot*, “treason is on the side of those who talk so easily about coercion. There is only one course to pursue that can be called *constitutional*, to wit:- Know their aim – redress their grievances if possible.” In a scathing conclusion directed toward Governor Andrew and other Northern hawks, the *Pilot* author claimed that unless it was proven “that the South has no *real* grievances (and nine tenths of the United States people believe they have) to be addressed, your proposal of coercion, your offers of armies, your summons of the militia are felonious acts; you are the traitors of the nation.”<sup>51</sup>

In an article celebrating Washington’s birthday, the *Pilot* used the opportunity to blame the New England fanatics for spoiling Washington’s vision for the country. “How solemn were his warnings against sectional divisions,” said the *Pilot*, which then solemnly reported that despite New England’s reverence for Washington during his life,

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<sup>50</sup> Richard O’Gorman in *Irish-American*, November 12, 1864.

<sup>51</sup> *Pilot*, February 16, 1861.

the region had “proved to be the pioneer fomenter of the causes which have produced disunion. Such is our history, and an awful lesson it teaches to the nations of the earth.” At the war’s outset, many Irish papers warned readers that the old European powers sought to re-colonize the country and should be distrusted. The *Metropolitan Record* told readers these European powers would probably work on behalf of the Confederacy and against the American Union. They would disregard the Monroe Doctrine and re-establish footholds in their former American colonies. “We must not shirk the issue, for as it is for a principle we are fighting, we cannot abandon it, though England, and France, and Spain were combined in one grand triple alliance to force us from our position,” it read.<sup>52</sup> In short, the Union would be well-served to follow the advice of Washington and remain weary of the old guard in Europe.

Much like Confederate nationalists, the American Irish framed the Civil War as another American Revolution. Shortly after Sumter, the *Pilot* continued their attack on the newspapers around the country that were “disseminating slanderous doubts on Irish fidelity to the country. Never has there been a greater lie insinuated than this.” The Irish were ever-loyal to the Constitution and the Union, and voting against the Republican administration had proved that. “They have too much at stake here,” read the article, “too much of their honor, and too much of their interests – to be traitors to the country.” Because of their long-standing ties to American ideals, the Irish paper announced that the Irish would be fighting for the “entire country” during the “present American Revolution.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Pilot*, February 23, 1861; *Metropolitan Record*, May 25, 1861.

<sup>53</sup> *Pilot*, April 27, 1861.

The *Herald* used figures like George Washington and James Monroe to sanction their frustrations with party politics. The Irish insisted that they stood for certain principles and were not stooges of any party; they were the true progenitors of Revolutionary principles. They made mention of the similar tracts taken by certain Founding fathers, thus placing themselves in exclusive American company. “Principia, not hominess” (which translated as “principles, not men”) was the motto of James Monroe. Everyone was familiar with Washington’s views on party division in America. The *Herald* pointed out that both had been elected to a second term with no opposition because they were men who followed principles instead of other men, and Irish-American politics emulated these great American statesmen.<sup>54</sup>

Irish who openly sought a peaceful resolution used the Founding Fathers as well, thus insulating themselves from accusations of disloyalty. It was difficult to call a group unpatriotic, even while they blasted the Union war effort, so long as the Father of the Country and his colleagues agreed with them. A July 1861 letter to the *Pilot* from “O’Callahan” (in Cairo, Illinois), for example, worked against coercion, using the Founding Fathers’ words to make his points. “Have the American people become so demoralized as not to hearken to the voice of reason?” O’Callahan asked. The only two options were to force the rebels back in (or to “whip them back”) or to let them go peacefully. “Whip them back (if we can) is opposed to the teachings of our wisest men; for, as Jefferson says, ‘the Union cannot hold together by force of arms. It must be a union of hearts as well as hands, a union of minds as well as States.’” He inquired further, “And do you call this a Union? Certainly Washington’s master mind never dreamt of such a Union.” Coercing rogue states back under the auspices of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Catholic Herald*, February 23, 1861.

Republican government undid the work of 1776. After all, “The noble signers of the Declaration of Independence would not have done so if they could foresee the probable end of their great and magnificent work. Bunker Hill and Princeton would have been unheard of; the village of Yorktown would be still veiled in obscurity.” This included the Irish, whose contributions had not been properly highlighted. “In achieving the independence of this great country, it is unnecessary for me to say the Irish took a prominent position,” reasoned O’Callahan. “When the star of American independence was yet dark and dismal, they fought for it,” he wrote, arguing that “the recital of the deeds of the celebrated Irishmen who figured so conspicuously in the revolutionary struggles of ’76 is superfluous, but it seems as if these things have been forgotten for the past twenty years, Irishmen being slighted for being such.” By taking ownership of the American Revolution, the Irish could use its meaning to much greater effect. In addition, it served to legitimize them in the United States. “‘Oh, he is but an Irishman!’ has been often wafted into my ears,” continued O’Callahan, “when the recollection of our fathers’ deeds would make amends for these rude expressions, uttered by men who do not know their country’s history. In the present struggle where do we find the Irish? Not in the vanguard but in the brunt of the battle- the place they asked for, and where Irishmen fight best.”<sup>55</sup>

When the Civil War remained a war to re-establish the Union, the American Irish supported it wholeheartedly. They blamed the Confederacy for waging an unnecessary rebellion against the Union. The South had “rebelled without sufficient cause, and it is fighting without true principle. A terrible reverse is threatening it – the complete emancipation of its slaves as well as the entire annihilation of its army.” The Irish used

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<sup>55</sup> “O’Callahan” (of Cairo, Illinois) to the *Pilot*, July 26, 1861, printed August 24, 1861.

the American Revolution as the standard for a justified rebellion. “In 1776, this country entered into a revolution from justice: the example has not been lost on the world,” said the *Pilot*, and “in 1862 the same country is suppressing a revolution in which there is no justice: the instances will not be lost sight of. The double fact proves the true greatness of the American people.”<sup>56</sup>

Judge Daly traced the problems with the Southern states all the way back to the American Revolution. It was Daly’s belief that South Carolina’s doctrine of nullification and secession had their origins with the Revolutionary War. Daly quoted John Adams, who wrote to General Horatio Gates in March 1776, “All our misfortunes arise from a single source – the reluctance of the Southern colonies to a Republican Government.” According to Daly, “Washington, knowing their [Southern states] restlessness under rule, their high estimate of their own importance, and that they had interests peculiar and different from the other States, gave some advice to the whole country, the wisdom of which, if not previously appreciated, is now painfully evident.” Daly further quoted Washington on the importance of the colonies acting as a united country instead of as “thirteen independent sovereignties, eternally counteracting each other.” The Irish also equated the Confederacy with England. The Southern army was filled only due to compulsion, claimed the *Pilot*. This Confederate repression was akin to British despotism. The worst violation was the employment of Indian mercenaries. “The despotism of the Confederacy is best illustrated by its employment of the Indian savages. Sanguinary Britain did this in the war of the Revolution, and the British cheek blushes yet for the inhumanity of the act.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Pilot*, September 20, 1862; May 10, 1862.

<sup>57</sup> *Irish-American*, July 19, 1862; *Pilot*, September 20, 1862. Bracketed text added.

The *Record* claimed that the country had failed to heed the warnings of Washington in getting suckered into a fight between fanatical fringe elements. “That an armed collision between the two hostile elements of slavery and abolitionism was inevitable no sane man ever doubted,” said the *Record* in July 1862. Nevertheless, the fact that it would “drag into the conflict the conservative elements of both sections was an improbability that was almost regarded as an impossibility.” The conservative elements had been swept into a frenzy of sectionalism (which should be “thrown overboard by every true patriot”) because they had deemed themselves “so much wiser in our generation that, in the flippant phrase of the day, we had begun to look upon” George Washington as an “old fogy.” By disregarding the teachings of Washington, the moderate majority had been tricked into a war between abolitionism and secessionists.<sup>58</sup>

The Irish used George Washington’s military record to take issue with Lincoln’s management of the war. The *Irish-American* compared their beloved McClellan and his supposed military shortcomings to George Washington during the early years of the Revolutionary War. McClellan’s failures during the peninsular campaign had been the fault of “jealous subordinates and political intermeddlers in Washington,” claimed the paper. “Unthinking people swallow this twaddle as profoundly sagacious criticism,” said the *Irish-American*, asking their “captious contemporaries what was the success of General George Washington in the first two years of the Revolutionary struggle?” Washington lost at Long Island, Harlem Heights, White Plains, Brandywine, and Germantown: “was he therefore, as a General, incompetent and unworthy of confidence?” In fact, he “failed of success,” claimed the *Irish-American*, for he had “not men and means equal to the achievement of results such as the over zealous and too

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<sup>58</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, July 5, 1862.

impatient patriots of the time rigidly demanded as the proof of his capacity. The parallels were striking to the situation in which McClellan found himself. In response to those who claimed his heart was not in it, or that he was too slow and cautious, or to those who wanted a more ambitious or energetic general, the paper pointed out that “such were the assertions, such the claims of the enemies of Washington, through the gloomy years of 1776 and ’77.” Those who wanted to replace Washington with Horatio Gates eventually became Washington’s “flatterers” who claimed they had always supported the “‘unsuccessful’ leader of 1776 and ’77.” “History teaches us a lesson. It instructs us to be patient, be careful, be just.”<sup>59</sup>

The Irish made Republican political opponents appear un-American by using the statements of Founding Fathers against them and by unflatteringly contrasting them with the most revered American statesmen. For example, the *Record* used Alexander Hamilton in such a manner in the fall of 1862. Hamilton had said that the American Constitution was written and designed “for the common protection and general welfare of the United States,” but Lincoln was ignoring the Constitution by suppressing freedom of speech and the press, overthrowing states’ rights as expressed in the Constitution, and suspending habeas corpus. “Abraham Lincoln – a man who is as immeasurably below Alexander Hamilton as the black race is below the white,” read the *Record*, “has found in his sectional policy a pretext for setting aside that Constitution, which Hamilton told us is expressly designed for the common protection and general welfare of the United States.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Irish-American*, September 13, 1862.

<sup>60</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, April 4, 1863.

As their support for the war effort waned in early 1863, the American Irish used Washington's birthday as a chance to point out how far the Republican war effort had strayed from Washington's guiding principles and wisdom. The *Irish-American* even reported in 1863 that the country barely had the energy to celebrate Washington's birthday since the Republican war effort had gone so far south. With the national finances in ruin, the Constitution trashed, and Northern morale dwindling as a result, "can it be wondered that the people find no heart for the celebration of an anniversary of the memories pertaining to which our present position is a mockery?" By July 1864, the *Pilot* seemed to accept that the war had trashed the legacy of 1776. "And has all this ended? Is this great and beneficent fabric of government shattered? Has the Union been dissolved in fragments: have we lost our great inheritance and Constitutional liberty?"<sup>61</sup>

As the war dragged on and the Irish were more frequently derided as Copperheads, they fought back by attaching the nation's greatest historical hero to that derogatory term. "George Washington was a 'Copperhead,' according to the Republican definition of that word," said the *Freeman's Journal*, which made the point by quoting Washington's Farewell Address. Washington had frowned upon alienating any portion of the country, and he commented on his reverence for the sacred authority of the American Constitution and his desire to resist changing the document. As a strict constructionist, the Irish contended, Washington's politics and their own dovetailed nicely. "*Let there be no change by usurpation,*" Washington had warned, and the *Freeman's Journal* took the chance to point out that the Irish-American principles aligned much more closely with the Father of the Country and his sentiments than did the Republicans. Even those rabidly-Copperhead Irish Americans supported the legacy of

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<sup>61</sup> *Irish-American*, February 28, 1863; *Pilot*, July 2, 1864.

1776. The *Record* proclaimed that as a Catholic paper, it opposed the concept of revolution. Nevertheless, it steadfastly stood behind the American colonies that had risen up against the British, for they “rebelled not in resistance to the principle of a legitimate government under which they lived, but they rebelled against the unconstitutional tyranny which that government attempted to exercise in their regard.” Unlike the case in 1861, government had started that revolution.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter to the *Record*, a “Jeffersonian Republican” called for a new union to be formed. Every state would reclaim their militias, seize all national property, and renounce the Lincoln government. “After Lincoln and his national debt has been entirely wiped out, then let a general convention of all the States be called, and a new union be formed; and the army and navy, and all the Federal departments, reduced to what they were under Gen. Jackson.” After all, Lincoln was the candidate of violating the Constitution bent on warring against the seceded states until “he changes our form of government, and elevates the nigger to the level of the white man, if he kills all the white men in accomplishing it.” As an Irish-American soldier near Petersburg, Virginia pointed out in November 1864, Republican editors like of the *Tribune* equated the defeatist Democrats with Irishmen (in a derogatory fashion). The implication was that they were all disloyal traitors to the Union cause. “In aiming at the above, he not only belies history, but throws a shadow over the illustrious founders of this once happy and prosperous Republic,” said a man calling himself “Hibernian.” He reminded everyone that Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson were Democrats, too.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, April 25, 1863; *Metropolitan Record*, April 21, 1860.

<sup>63</sup> “A Jeffersonian Republican” (Atlantic City, NJ) to the *Metropolitan Record*, July 29, 1864, printed August 13, 1864 ; “Hibernian” to *Irish-American*, November 18, 1864, printed December 3, 1864.

Irish Copperheads justified their anti-war position by comparing the Republicans to the British government during the American Revolution. The *Record* suggested that the reason for the American Revolution was military trumping civilian power in the American colonies as 1776 approached. In 1861, this had repeated itself in the American South. “In their Declaration of Independence the ‘rebels’ and ‘traitors’ of 1776 told the King George III that he had ‘affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power,’” said the *Record*, in addition to denying them jury trials, ravaging their coasts and burning their towns. The parallels to the Northern subjection of the South were striking. “Let the ‘loyal’ and the ‘patriotic’ while ‘honoring’ the memory of Washington remember that he was a ‘rebel,’ a ‘traitor,’ a ‘slaveholder,’ and a native of the South,” said the *Record*. In fact, Washington hailed from “that noble old State which has done more for true liberty and self government than all the canting abolition crew that have insisted on her destruction.” The Irish justified their position on slavery on the grounds that the Constitution had sanctioned its existence but also that the Founding Fathers had owned slaves and failed to eradicate the institution. The *United States Catholic Intelligencer* (precursor to the *Pilot*) had asked why the Founding Fathers allowed it to persist, if slavery was such a “blot on the escutcheon of American freedom.” The Irish were on Washington’s side against Lincoln and the Republicans.<sup>64</sup>

The Irish confronted charges of “disloyalty” by equating the term “loyal” and those who professed it with the Loyalists of the Revolutionary era. The *Freeman’s Journal* reprinted a piece from the *Lancaster Intelligencer* in which the author expressed disgust at the use of the word “loyal” itself, claiming it was an antiquated term left over from the days when Americans were forced to profess fealty to the British king.

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<sup>64</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, March 4, 1865; O’Connor, *Civil War Boston*, 23-24.

“Between the loyalists of 1776 and the loyalists of 1864, there really is very little difference, hence our willingness to accede to them the same name,” read the piece. Both groups of loyalists believed in a strong central government in which the few governed the many at the point of a bayonet. “Nowhere is there any perceptible or essential difference between the loyalists of the Revolution and the loyalists under the reign of Lincoln.” The *Record* asked President Andrew Johnson to stop using the term “loyalty” as it related to Southerners during Reconstruction. “It is full time that Mr. Johnson abandoned a term so entirely inapplicable to the case. There is no disloyalty in the south; there can be no disloyalty except among those who are conspiring for the overthrow of the Constitution.”<sup>65</sup>

After 1863, Irish support for the war was dwindling, and increasingly “disloyal” statements graced the pages of Irish newspapers. The Irish rejected the notion that standing up for the rights of Southerners constituted disloyal behavior, and they used the rhetoric of the American Revolution to make their point. The Confederacy had merely attempted another American Revolution. “Was the successful revolution of the Thirteen Colonies the *finality* of Revolution, and are no people hereafter to claim which they maintained successfully?” asked the *Record*. The Southern states were sovereign states, as opposed to mere colonies too. “Now, we defy any Republican, or Radical, to prove from history, or by fair, candid argument, that if the Revolution of 1776 was right, the war for the independence of the Southern Confederacy was wrong.” The *Record* objected to the celebration of the Fourth of July on the fields of Gettysburg in 1865 on ideological and symbolic grounds. “The Fourth at Gettysburg! What a strange juxtaposition of terms! What a confusion of ideas! What contradiction of principles is

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<sup>65</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, May 21, 1864; *Metropolitan Record*, December 15, 1866.

embodied in the phrase. Did the men that got up this celebration reflect that if the principles that underlie the Fourth had not been flung to the wind, Gettysburg would still be but a name upon the map?" The *Record* claimed that the goals of the war had not been accomplished if the country were to remain the country of the founders. States' rights, the principle of self-government, and the right of revolution had emerged intact. No Republican could deny that unless "he indeed be prepared to condemn the Fathers of this Republic, and to brand them as traitors."<sup>66</sup>

Many Irish-American papers equated the Republican Party's policies with Tory policies of the 1770's. The *Freeman's Journal* considered the Republican platform to be a "revival of Toryism" that stood to undo the work of 1776. Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams, Jackson, Webster, and Clay had all warned of the dangers of sectional parties, but the country had ignored the great American statesmen and allowed the "recklessness of secessionism and the virulence of abolitionism" to cause a war. The Constitution had then been set aside, while the "words of Washington and Jefferson have been disregarded, but their work has been undone. The Federal Government stands to the South in the very attitude that the British Parliament stood towards the Colonies. We have revived and installed in power the Toryism of 1776, with all its pretensions, its tyranny, and its hatred of popular rights." Taxation, the denial of habeas corpus and jury trial, the suppression of a free press all were worse than they had been under the British: "it was left for the Toryism of the American Congress to outstrip in every particular the despotic action of the British Parliament which drove the colonies to rebellion." The *Freeman's Journal* called on its readers to fight the new Toryism of the Republican Party. "The whole political battle of the Revolution is to be fought over again!"

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<sup>66</sup> *Metropolitan Record*, July 29, 1865; July 15, 1865; May 13, 1865.

screamed the *Freeman's Journal*, and “The Toryism of today is more rampant and is more insolent than that which our forefathers fought against. It is more cunning and unscrupulous. It must be met by organization and bold agitation.” It was high time “the citizens form clubs, organize as Liberty Boys, revive the patriotism of revolutionary days, take up the old watch-words, ‘No taxation without representation,’ ‘No privileged orders,’ ‘liberty of the press and assemblage,’ and ‘freedom of commerce.’”<sup>67</sup>

By the height of Radical Reconstruction, the *Freeman's Journal* attested that the Republicans were worse than any of the European forms of government. The paper had claimed in the past that kings had often been labeled as despots while republics were viewed as free governments. By 1868, however, “the case is lamentably changed. We see, if we will look with impartial eyes, several *monarchies* where the *will* and the *rights* of the *people* have more effect on their governments than the will and the rights of American citizenship have on the Congressional usurpation that is *running* affairs at Washington.” The *Irish-American* ran a piece from the *Dublin Freeman* blasting the imprisonment of John Mitchel and comparing him to other “rebels” like George Washington and Ben Franklin. The author found it strange that America sympathized with rebellions all over the world but not within their own borders.<sup>68</sup>

### **Credit for Winning the Civil War**

According to Susannah Ural Bruce, Irish support for the war waned in its later years because of the growing sense that “Puritans” and not Irish would receive the credit for the long casualty lists. The Irish worried that none of this would help them in postwar

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<sup>67</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, January 5, 1867 (re-printed from the *Albany Argus*).

<sup>68</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, April 4, 1868; *Irish-American*, August 12, 1865. Mitchel spent a short stint in prison after the Civil War.

America. A member of the Massachusetts Irish Ninth complained about the refusal of the *New York Herald* to reference the heroism of the Irish Ninth in the Battle of Hanover Court House. Irishmen in Chicago claimed that Puritans in Massachusetts were claiming the heroism and death tolls of the Irish Ninth for the Old Guard of the Bay State. The Irish needed to change the arc of American history and the role of the Irish in it through the Civil War. The *Pilot* called American history “heretic” and Anglo-Saxonism renounced for its “soul-killing tendencies” in 1861. Irish papers equated traditional American history with Anglo-Saxonism and thus wanted Irishmen to fight only in Irish units in the Civil War. The Irish needed to earn their Americanism by wearing their patriotism on their sleeves and making certain the entire country noticed it.<sup>69</sup>

In a letter to the *Record*, a “Boston Priest” expressed Irish frustrations with the “ingratitude on the part of the Government towards our brave soldiers, who volunteered their services to the country” when “The Irish people of Boston and vicinity are beginning to find fault with the Government, and to give expression to their feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction in not seeing Colonel Corcoran’s name on the list of exchanged prisoners. He and his gallant command were among the first to tender their services to the government, and therefore, we think that he and his fellow prisoners of the 69<sup>th</sup> should have been among the first exchanges.” The author abhorred the unfairness of “exchanging the natives and leaving the Irish portion to suffer in durance vile.” One Irishman even thought that the “Abolitionist Puritans” sought to kill off all of the Irish by killing them off in the army and replacing them with blacks. This would then halt the

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<sup>69</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 109-110; Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 142.

spread of the Catholic religion in the United States.<sup>70</sup> The Irish wanted to assure that their service was noticeable in order to prevent this from happening.

Irish leaders wanted the Irish to serve in all-Irish units so as to be as visible as possible in their military service. The Irish Brigade and its recruitment of Irish-American soldiers garnered significant attention, but Colonel James A. Mulligan and his “Irish Brigade” in Illinois (actually the 23<sup>rd</sup> IL regiment) also experienced a similar phenomenon. From the war’s outbreak, Mulligan received an outpouring of letters from Irishmen emphasizing their desires to serve with him or in another all-Irish unit. In May 1861, for instance, an Irishman informed Mulligan that “I have no doubt but I could raise thirty or forty young, able-bodied men for you. We are not numerous enough to raise a company but our patriotism is none the less.” Captain James Cahill asked Mulligan that if he were to reorganize his regiment if he could get a command in it, as he would “prefer being in an Irish regiment.” A letter from a group in Wilmington seeking to form a company offered up their services to Mulligan as well. A private in Mulligan’s command wrote to him complaining about the enemies of the Irish race and religion and how they were actively seeking to undermine their contributions to the war effort. He predicted the fighting would continue for fifty years without the Irish race fighting, as “there is not honesty nor bravery enough in the balance to do good fighting.” He continued, “Let the Irish do the fighting,” as “we want all the credit.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Boston Priest” to the *Metropolitan Record*, undated, printed January 25, 1862; Letter from Philadelphia to the *Metropolitan Record*, December 8, 1864, printed December 24, 1864.

<sup>71</sup> An Irishman to Colonel James A. Mulligan, May 1861; Captain James Cahill to Mulligan, November 18, 1861, Folder 5 (Letters to James A. Mulligan, 1860-1861), Box 1; Wilmington Irishmen to Mulligan, November 11, 1861, Folder 6 (Letters to James A. Mulligan, November 1-15, 1861), Box 1; Private P. Casey (Company H) to Colonel James A. Mulligan, March 23, 1863, Folder 3 (Letters to James A. Mulligan, February 21-April, 1863), Box 2, James A. Mulligan Papers, Chicago Historical Society. Born to Irish parents in New York, Mulligan carried a profound interest in his Irish heritage throughout his life. Mulligan organized the 23<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Volunteers, then traveled to Washington to formally offer its services

Nothing did more for the reputation of Chicago's Irish than Mulligan and Reverend Dennis Dunne, who organized the 90<sup>th</sup> Illinois. These Irish units stood in stark contrast to stereotypes of ungrateful and disloyal Irish immigrants. An Irish crowd even cheered Stephen Douglas's 1861 speech that referred to Americans as "patriots or traitors." Mulligan received a nice obituary from the normally anti-Irish *Chicago Tribune*, which had been incensed over the draft riots in 1863. Mulligan's wife was lauded for her patriotism in raising money for an American flag for the regiment.<sup>72</sup>

The Irish wanted to ensure that their contributions to the Union war effort were not forgotten by their fellow Americans, even if that meant they needed to develop a selective amnesia regarding some of their other, seemingly less patriotic wartime activities (like the New York City Draft Riots and their abhorrence of President Lincoln). As soon as the war ended, the *Pilot* was already singing the praises of the contributions of Irish soldiers to saving the republic. When future Irishmen recorded "with flushed cheeks...this heroic age, they can say with proud consciousness 'we too, are Americans, and our fathers bled and died to establish this beloved country.'" Colonel Michael Corcoran instructed the Irish who wished to join the Union Army to be sure to join an all-Irish regiment to make sure their services would not go unnoticed to the American population. He told them to fight with their countrymen rather "than have your services unappreciated and national identity lost among strangers." Captain M.H. MacNamara

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to the Union war effort. Mulligan turned down the offer of a brigadier-generalship when his 23<sup>rd</sup> Illinois could not follow him, and he earned a good reputation while overseeing the humane prison at Camp Douglas outside Chicago for the first year of the war. He died in Confederate captivity in July 1864 – see Daniel Z. Kreisman, "A Civil War Profile: Colonel James A. Mulligan of the 'Irish Brigade'" in *Manuscripts* 51, no. 14(1999): 295-300.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "Preserving the Union, Shaping a New Image: Chicago's Irish Catholics and the Civil War," in *At the Crossroads: Old Saint Patrick's and the Chicago Irish*, ed. Ellen Skerrett (Chicago: Wild Onion Books, 1997), 53-56, 65. For a brief discussion of Mulligan and his unit's Civil War heroics, see Harold F. Smith, "Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 56, no. 2(Summer 1963): 164-176.

wrote his history of the Irish Ninth to remind the world that when the Irish had been exiled from their native land, they had served “their adopted country in the day of her trial.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Irish-American Civil War Memory**

The myth of Irish-American courage as an intrinsically ethnic trait emerged out of the Irish-American memory of the Civil War. Irish-written, post-war histories placed the Irish Brigade in the thick of every battle and emphasized its bravery and unyielding commitment to the Union cause. In actuality, Irish zeal had waned during 1862 and plummeted after Fredericksburg and the Emancipation Proclamation. Recruiting posters emphasized pay, not Irish principle by late 1862. Irish loyalty to the Union war effort had been conditional upon the war objectives remaining strictly in line with their best interest. While it is impossible to determine the levels of ethnic pride that convinced the Irish to enlist and fight, Irish letters indicated that they wanted their service to be remembered for posterity. The memoirs that came out after the Civil War said nothing of draft riots or bounties for Irish enlistments; they only emphasized Irish commitment to the Union. “Whether in hagiography or in scholarly analysis, humanity and individualism are ignored in favor of propaganda,” proclaimed William L. Burton in an article on Indiana’s ethnic regiments during the Civil War.<sup>74</sup>

Typical of this type of study was Thomas Hamilton Murray’s study of the 9<sup>th</sup> Connecticut regiment made up predominantly of Irish soldiers. Murray, one of the

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<sup>73</sup> *Pilot* quoted in Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 59; Col. Michael Corcoran quoted in Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 60; Captain M.H. MacNamara quoted in Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 69.

<sup>74</sup> Randall M. Miller, “Catholic Religion, Irish Ethnicity, and the Civil War,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller et al. (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1998), 275-279. William L. Burton, “Indiana’s Ethnic Regiments,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 14, no. 2(Fall 1980): 230.

earliest Secretaries-General of the American Irish Historical Society, had published several articles on the Connecticut Irish in the Revolutionary War and King Philip's War. In a familiar refrain, "No regiment in the Nineteenth Corps, or in any corps, possessed braver hearts or a firmer spirit of loyalty to the Republic." His stated purpose in writing the book was "to perpetuate a remembrance of the valiant deeds of these survivors of the Civil War, and their departed comrades of the Ninth, is the object of the present volume."<sup>75</sup>

Along with draftees from other countries, many Irish tried to use their foreign birth as a way out of the American military by claiming they were ineligible on the basis of foreign citizenship. On October 20, 1862, Lincoln issued an executive order stating "It is hereby ordered that all persons who may have actually been drafted into militia service of the United States, and who may claim exemption on account of alienage [sic], will make application therefore directly to the Department of State, or through their respective Ministers or Consuls." Some, like Michael Ash of Green Lake County, Wisconsin, claimed exemption on November 25, 1862 on the grounds that he had been born in Ireland and was thus ineligible based on his not being a citizen of the United States. The U.S. Secretary of State sent a letter to his hometown (St. Marie, Wisconsin) city clerk inquiring about whether his name appeared on the town's voting rolls. Town Clerk Robert Thompson confirmed that Ash had in fact been "a regular voter." Ash stuck to his guns, the outcome of the case unknown. Some second-generation Irishmen, such as Richard Barrett of Suzerne County, Pennsylvania, claimed exemption on the grounds that his father had "not become a naturalized citizen of the United States" while he was under

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Hamilton Murray, *History of the Ninth Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, "The Irish Regiment," in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865: The Record of a Gallant Command on the March, in Battle and in Bivouac* (New Haven, CT: The Price, Lee, & Adkins Company, 1903), 7.

the age of twenty-one, thus making him “the subject of a foreign power.” Barrett was discharged on November 7, 1862. A letter from a Draft Commissioner to the Commissioner’s Office discharged Irishman John M. Barlow from service on April 17, 1863 because his Canadian-born father, despite having voted for years, had never announced his intention to become a citizen of the United States and had thus been illegally voting. Andrew Burk of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania said that he had never “been naturalized nor has he taken the oath of allegiance to the United States; That he has never voted in the United States at any election for any officer nor has he received any of the privileges of citizenship; That the Father of Petitioner died a subject of Great Britain in Ireland; That Petitioner is now a subject of a Foreign Power; That he resides with his family in the township of Hazleton aforesaid and that he has been drafted to serve in the military of the United States. He therefore humbly prays he may be relieved from military duty under said draft.” He was discharged in November 1862. Patrick Carrigan of the 1st district in Vermont wrote a statement (undated) explaining his background. In it, he explained how he was from Rutland County in Vermont but that he had been born in Ireland, arriving in the United States in 1855. “I have never been naturalized and have never declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States nor have I even exercised the right of suffrage by voting at any election in any of said states! And I claim to be exempt – from the military service of the United States on the ground that I am the subject of a foreign government and have not declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States nor voted in any of said states.” Carrigan was discharged in September 1863. John Carroll of Portage County, Ohio wrote directly to Secretary Seward to explain to him his situation. He had been born in Ireland in 1830 and moved

to the United States on December 25, 1848. He went on: “Your petitioner further says that he has never before been naturalized nor has he ever voted at any election held in the United States neither has he ever intermeddled in any of the wars or difficulties of the said United States or in any other maneuver has he lost the allegiance he owed as subject to the crown of Great Britain.” After determining that he was not a citizen, Carroll was discharged in October 1862. When American citizenship favored the Irish (on election day, for example), they were quick to reap its benefits. When it did not help them (on draft day, for example), they rejected it.<sup>76</sup> None of these sentiments survived in traditional Irish lore, however.

No single event in the Civil War damaged Irish support quite like the catastrophic battle of Fredericksburg. In subsequent decades, however, a handful of prominent Irishmen refused to allow the historical record to accurately reflect that. While the record clearly demonstrates that Irish morale plummeted after 1862, Conyngham, St. Clair A. Mulholland, William McCarter, and Father William Corby seized control of American memory of the Irish-American experience in the Civil War.<sup>77</sup> As a result, they mythologized the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg (and other battles) and helped Americanize the Irish.

These memoirs, written in the decades following the Civil War, worked to mold and preserve the memory of Irish Civil War bravery. St. Clair A. Mulholland of the 116<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> United States National Archives, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Civil War Papers, 1861-1865, Entry #970 – Case Files on Drafted Aliens, 1862-1864, Box 1; Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 225.

<sup>77</sup> Craig A. Warren, “‘Oh, God, What a Pity!’: The Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg and the Creation of Myth” in *Civil War History* 47, no. 3(2001): 193. The disastrous assault on Marye’s Heights increasingly popularized the notion that the Irish were expendable for Union generals, as their numbers plummeted. In subsequent engagements at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, it was a “brigade” in name only. The charge at Marye’s Heights was one prominent example of “American heroism,” according to Mulholland – see Mulholland, *The Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment*, 241.

Pennsylvania provided the most notable example. Mulholland explained that one main reason for writing his memoirs was the following: “Let us hope that in the readers of the future our children may learn the story of “American heroism” at least as well as that of other ages and of other nations.” In these memoirs, Mulholland called the Union war cause “the holiest, noblest, purest, and best cause that ever summoned men to arms.” It was an idealistic cause, one to preserve and sustain a legacy “more dear and valuable than all else gained by the sword on earth – the first real Republic that has ever existed.” Mulholland glorified many of the famous Irish-American soldiers, notably Thomas Francis Meagher. After Meagher resigned in 1863, Mulholland recalled that the officers of the 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania had met and resolved that he had been one of the bravest American patriots to fight for “the cause of liberty and the Constitution” (of course, he left out how angry many Irish were with Meagher’s endorsement of Lincoln in 1864). Mulholland recalled the slaughter at Gettysburg by saying that “men greater than kings” had lost their lives in “defence [sic] of the Union and human liberty,” a sacrifice and a battlefield much dearer to the American people than any of the celebrated sanctuaries of Europe.” Mulholland and others took to the newspapers to defend the Irish from attacks as deserters and protestors. He was instrumental in the construction of a monument to the 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania at Gettysburg and a bronze statue of Father Corby in 1910. This placed the Irish Catholic on hallowed American ground and further established them as Americans.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Mulholland, *The Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment*, iv, v, 114, 120-121, 155; Miller, “Catholic Religion,” 283-286. Meagher had been a rather loose cannon during the war, in which accusations of alcohol abuse during battle were commonplace. His 1864 endorsement of Lincoln further alienated many Irish, but the works of Mulholland and others helped solidify his legacy of bravery and undaunted courage.

Mulholland's memoir perpetuated the stereotype of the courageous fighting Irishman in his history of the Irish Brigade (entitled "The Irish Brigade in the War for the Union" and published in 1892). Quoting Washington, McClellan and King George II on the bravery of Irish soldiers, Mulholland contributed a piece of historical propaganda on behalf of Irish America. Mulholland retold all the numerous stories of the Irish Brigade and its prominent members and leaders, and he emphasized the high death tolls in making the Irish Brigade into American martyrs. "Few of those brave souls who, under the green flag of their own native land, fought so well to defend the Stars and Stripes of the land of their adoption, are now with us," wrote Mulholland. A few years earlier those few survivors had met to dedicate a monument and statue at Gettysburg, on the spot "that has been crimsoned by their blood." There they prayed for God to "grant sweet rest to the souls of those who died in defence [sic] of their adopted country."<sup>79</sup>

Conyngham's 1869 book romanticized the Irish Brigade's assault on Marye's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg. For example, he described the assault as honorable, gallant, and dashing. Corby introduced the notion that the Irish had charged up Marye's Heights knowing full well the mission's futility from the beginning. William McCarter's book seconded these assertions, saying that they knew it was doomed from the outset, and McCarter's decision to disobey Meagher's orders to stay behind further romanticized his role. According to Craig A. Warren, St. Clair A. Mulholland's book constituted the third "work of Irish wartime mythology." Arguing that courage and Irish were basically synonyms at the beginning of this work, he sought to prove the association and nowhere did he try harder to prove that association than in his discussion of Marye's

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<sup>79</sup> St. Clair A. Mulholland, "The Irish Brigade in the War for the Union," in *History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland: March 17, 1771 – March 17, 1892*, ed. John H. Campbell (Philadelphia: Hibernian Society, 1892), 290, 313-314.

Heights. Mulholland turned all the Irish participants into martyrs by including lines like that of one subordinate who was ordered to “Go there and die” by a superior officer. “Yes, my General,” he willfully replied. In summation, Mulholland wrote that “They were not there to fight, only to die.” Mulholland also claimed to have heard a Confederate under Cobb’s command in the 24<sup>th</sup> Georgia yell out “Oh, God! What a pity! Here come Meagher’s fellows!” over the deafening noise of battle, which would have been highly unlikely. Mulholland may have even borrowed the line from John Boyle O’Reilly’s famous poem on the battle, published in 1875. The New York City Draft riots, outrage over exorbitant Irish casualty rates, and biting racism are nowhere to be found in these accounts. These authors extrapolated the bravery of individual Irish soldiers to all Irish soldiers, and they emphasized the excitement of the Irish in 1861 to the entire war effort. Mulholland, McCarter, Conyngham, and Corby wanted to make the Irish into complete Americans through this work; they sought the approval and respect of native Americans. By ignoring the disgruntled Irish and playing to the soft spot in America’s heart for the poor and oppressed fighting to the death for the Union, these authors influenced how America remembered the Irish Brigade but also helped the Irish claim first-class American citizenship.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Warren, “Oh, God! What a Pity!” 204-214, 221. This preoccupation with the “Fighting Irish” has persisted to contemporary times. See also John McCormack, “Never Were Men so Brave” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 8, no. 1(1969): 36-44; James Callaghan, “Red on Green: “Meagher on the Sword” and the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg” *Civil War Times Illustrated* (December 1998): 54-62, 99-100; Kevin M. O’Beirne, “The Irish Brigade at Chancellorsville” *America’s Civil War* 14, no. 6(January 2002): 34-41; Kevin E. O’Brien, “Into the Wheatfield: The Union Army’s Irish Brigade at Gettysburg” *Irish Sword* 19, no. 77(1995): 144-160; William A. Murphy, “The Charge of the Irish Brigade at Marye’s Heights in the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, 13 December 1862” *Irish Sword* 23, no. 91(2002): 23-32; Thomas E. Rice, “Desperate Courage” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 29, no. 5(1990): 58-64, 66, 68-70; Kevin E. O’Brien, “Blaze the Way and Stand To It, Boys!”: Captain Jack Donovan and the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg” in *Irish Sword* 20, no. 80(1996): 121-130; Thomas Francis Meagher, *The Last Days of the 69<sup>th</sup> in Virginia* (New York: Office of the *Irish-American*, 1861).

Although these Irish leaders loathed Lincoln and his war effort, one would not find any evidence of this by reading the major Irish-American war memoirs. St. Clair A. Mulholland detailed Lincoln's visit to the Irish Brigade and explained how compassionate the president was. Lincoln was received well and wanted to trade places with his valiant soldiers. Mulholland spent several pages extolling Lincoln's kind-heartedness and discussing his fraternization with the Irish troops. Daniel George MacNamara's book on the Irish Ninth expressed almost hero-worship for President Lincoln. He embodied all that was good in the Union war effort and served as a hero for the troops. According to MacNamara, Lincoln embodied everything that the troops were fighting for. "He was loved and revered by every one from the highest general to the lowest private. It was enough for them to know that he was true to the cause for which all were ready to die," said MacNamara. When Lincoln would walk by, "the troops passed in review every eye was kindly, lovingly turned towards him. His tall form and silk hat as he sat on horseback were ever in their mind's eye. His face was engraved on their hearts." Lincoln's only problem was that his honesty, which helped him in governing the country, served as a detriment in being commander-in-chief. He was too nice for the job, run over by certain ambitious generals. James P. Sullivan of the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers also remembered Lincoln when he wrote his Civil War memoirs in 1886. Contrasting the two wartime presidents, Sullivan remembered Davis as a tyrant but Lincoln as a true heir of 1776, who unsuccessfully (but through no fault of his own) had tried to smooth things over with the South prior to the Civil War.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Mulholland, *Story of the 116<sup>th</sup> PA*, 83-90; MacNamara, *History of the Ninth Regiment*, 236, 283-284. MacNamara (and his brother) actually tried to leave his regiment for personal advancement in an all-black regiment, but this was obviously not an angle MacNamara or other Irish featured with much prominence –

## Conclusion

Throughout the Civil War, the American Irish used their version of American history. They claimed that the America was not a Protestant nation. In fact, Irish Catholics were inherently the most American citizens. They had contributed to American greatness throughout its history. They praised the great Irish statesmen (and claimed some that were actually Scotch-Irish) that had served the country. While America had served as a sanctuary for the Irish, the Irish had done their part for America too. The Irish emphasized their service in the Union Army, but their antipathy to the war effort itself required explanation. Therefore, the Irish used the words of the Founding Fathers to exculpate their seemingly counterproductive rhetoric during the war. They claimed that Washington favored Irish soldiers and sympathized with Ireland's plight overseas. By using the words of the Founding Fathers, the Irish claimed their ideas were actually purely patriotic.

The Irish emphasized their service in the Union Army at this time. Clearly concerned by other groups taking all the credit for the Union victory, the Irish mounted a propaganda campaign to assure their memory of their Civil War service would be firmly entrenched in the public's mind. They succeeded in writing all the less heroic images (like the New York City Draft Riots) out of their narrative, instead using a handful of Civil War memoirs to invent and propagate Irish-American courage as an intrinsically ethnic trait. Irish-American memoirs publicized purely noble reasons for enlisting and claimed that the Irish had always revered the great President Lincoln.

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see William L. Burton, "Irish Regiments in the Union Army: The Massachusetts Experience" in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 11, no. 2(1983): 108; James P. Sullivan, *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade*, 13-15.

Fifty years later, the Irish would once again find themselves at odds with an American administration. This time, Irish-American leaders objected to Woodrow Wilson's policies during and after World War I. The objections had more to do with Ireland and not Irish America, although the lines between those two were intentionally blurred. They would again brand their political opponents as un-American and use American history to sanction their viewpoints. This time, however, the Irish framed this fight as a front in the war to free Ireland.

**CHAPTER V – “NOW WHY THE OFFENSIVE TERM ‘ANGLO’ SHOULD BE TACKED ON TO A RESPECTABLE NAME LIKE ‘AMERICAN’ SURPASSETH UNDERSTANDING”: THE AMERICAN IRISH DEFINE UN-AMERICANISM DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR ERA**

**Introduction**

By the dawn of the First World War, the United States was a budding world power. It had the capability to directly impact Ireland and its pursuit of autonomy. The Unionism the Irish proclaimed during the Civil War had been supplanted by a specific Irish-American brand of internationalism geared at freeing Ireland from the inimical, repugnant, and un-American oppressor, Great Britain. Instead of thanking America for providing them refuge, the Irish wanted to use America to free Ireland. As such, they began promoting America as a purveyor of world freedom as opposed to a sanctuary for the oppressed. Therefore, the more assimilated American Irish of the First World War era advocated an Americanism that more directly affected the fortunes of Ireland. Their Americanism traced the broader contours of American power. Nationalists in Ireland joined their Irish-American brethren in promoting these ideas during this era. While much division existed both in the United States and Ireland on the way forward, the Irish were united by opposition to Woodrow Wilson and the continued failure to secure autonomy in Ireland.

During the First World War, Irish-American notions of what constituted true Americanism and un-Americanism reflected both the Irish place in society and America's place in the world. America's emergence as a world power capable of directly impacting geopolitical affairs meant that the United States could pragmatically determine the future of Ireland. As a result, while domestic concerns still colored their Americanism, the

more-established Irish molded their Americanism to fit the realities of the new global power hierarchy. A specific brand of Irish-American internationalism aimed squarely at England crystallized within Irish-American circles. Nativism and bigotry were still branded as un-American, with England and everything English remaining the most basic manifestation of un-Americanism. The Irish labeled Puritanism, autocracy, aristocracy, and nativism as “English” (and thus, un-American) concepts. More poignantly, President Wilson personally and his Wilsonian internationalism (embodied in the League of Nations) came under fire, labeled as English un-American. Wilson’s opponents, especially those who opposed American entry into the League of Nations, were “true Americans” who embraced the principles inherent in the Monroe Doctrine, Washington’s Farewell Address, and supporting national self-determination for small nations. The American Irish, being far more firmly entrenched in mainstream American society by the 1910s, viewed America in much the same way, as a beacon of hope for the oppressed peoples of the world and a revolving door for anyone who embraced its principles of liberty and freedom. Although England remained the principle embodiment of what was un-American in both eras, America had changed. The Irish sense of “Union” comprised the symbolic antagonist to English imperialism during the 1860s, yet by the 1910s, the United States could directly influence events in Europe.

On the eve of American entry into the World War, Irish-American nationalistic papers and organizations accused Wilson of trying to aid Old World empires at the expense of small nations fighting for liberty, including Poland, Ukraine, India, Egypt, and most notably Ireland. Calling this “un-American and subversive of the ideals and principles on which this country was founded,” the *Gaelic American* expressed

confidence that the American people would never let Wilson get away with it.<sup>1</sup> By the First World War, a unique brand of Irish-American internationalism had replaced the Irish-American Unionism of the Civil War era. It was isolationist only in so far as major European imperialists like Britain were concerned. The American Irish were actually an anti-imperialist brand of internationalist. They tirelessly advocated for the liberation of Ireland and other small nations from their imperial overlords, mainly Great Britain. Irish-American rhetoric favored traditional American isolationism, but they were only isolationist if isolationism favored Ireland.

American patriotism did not merely mean dedication to the United States but also to the “American” principles to which the Irish largely subscribed. These American principles were ecumenical in nature and thus needed applied to all anti-colonial movements. Irish-American Congressman William Bourke Cockran, in a speech entitled “True American Patriotism,” echoed these sentiments by saying that “American patriotism is a subject which embraces the whole globe and the whole duty of man. The American patriot is a soldier of civilization. Upon American patriotism depends the future destinies of the world.” Invoking General Weyler’s atrocities in Cuba and the bravery of American patriots during the American Revolution, E.J. McDermott pleaded his “Case of Ireland” to the New Louisville Auditorium in 1920: “No well-informed,

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<sup>1</sup> *Gaelic American*, March 10, 1917. The *Gaelic American* served as the mouthpiece of John Devoy and Judge Daniel F. Cohalan, so it had close ties to the Friends of Irish Freedom (hereafter FOIF). Devoy had been born in Ireland and accepted exile to the United States in 1871, serving on the staff of the *New York Herald* and rising to prominence in the secretive Irish-American nationalist organization the Clan na Gael. For the most thorough biography of Devoy, see Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America’s Fight for Irish Freedom* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998). For Devoy’s take on his own career, see John Devoy, *Recollection of an Irish Rebel*, ed. Sean O’Luing (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969). Hundreds of letters to and from Devoy spanning the entire length of his career are also published – see John Devoy et al., *Devoy’s Post-Bag, 1871-1928*, ed. William O’Brien and Desmond Ryan (Dublin: C.J. Fallon, Ltd., 1948).

educated American, if he is a GENUINE American with an unclouded mind, can, in this day, withhold his sympathy” from any nation on earth struggling to be free.<sup>2</sup>

Congressman Cockran made several speeches in support of American intervention in Ireland as early as 1916, and he used the Cuban example to promote an American-backed independence movement in Ireland. That year in Madison Square Garden, he made it clear that he spoke as an American on the Irish issue by asserting that “this meeting is wholly pro-American. It is American in its membership, its spirit, and its purpose...It is exclusively American.” Standing up to the “outrages upon civilization” that had occurred in Dublin in April 1916, Cockran referenced Cuba again by “invoking the principle which was pursued eighteen years ago when a neighboring island this republic intervened to end atrocities unspeakable, and by that act save a people from extinction.” Three years later, Cockran would again argue the parallel to the American rescue of Cuba, saying before the Committee on Foreign Affairs that “I venture to say the people of Ireland have more in common with us, are bound to us by ties far closer and interests far deeper than the people of the young Republic which this nation brought into existence” back in 1898. America was not only open to all but had the responsibility to spread American principles across the globe. As Denis McCarthy said of America, “She

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<sup>2</sup> William Bourke Cockran, “True American Patriotism,” Folder 6, Box 30, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; E.J. McDermott, “The Case of Ireland,” speech to New Louisville Auditorium, December 9, 1920, Folder 41, Box 1, George Cahill Papers, Burns Library, Boston College. William Bourke Cockran’s biographer (in a decidedly positive book) portrayed him as a politician who put principle above party while establishing a reputation in Irish circles as the “Orator of the race” – see James McGurkin, *Bourke Cockran: A Free Lance in American Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), xv. The Irish-born Bourke Cockran, as he was called, served four separate stints in the U.S. House of Representatives. A lover of Winston Churchill’s mother, Bourke Cockran mentored the young Winston Churchill between 1895 and 1906; for more on this fascinating story, see Michael McMenamin and Curt J. Zoller, *Becoming Winston Churchill: The Untold Story of Young Winston and His American Mentor* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007).

is the mighty democratic champion standing with sword drawn over against autocracy,” with “the whole world ...her field of action.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Irish Americans claimed that other national identities vanished upon accepting American citizenship. American citizenship existed for all who loved freedom, no matter where they lived. Denis McCarthy worked in the Knights of Columbus War Activity Office in Washington, D.C. in 1918-1919, during which time he published a pamphlet entitled “Why not an Irish Republic? A Plea for the Complete Independence of Ireland.” McCarthy argued that “Everyone who has sworn allegiance to America and who tries to live accordingly to American ideals, no matter where born is an American.” Classifying Americans further by nationhood was a faux qualification. As McCarthy said, “If there has been in American politics, an Irish vote, or a Swedish vote, or a vote known by the name of any other nationality, the fault has not been primarily with the people who have come hither from foreign lands, but rather with the political, social, and economic conditions which they found on their arrival.” True Americanism necessitated an egalitarian civic standing. The *Irish World* reprinted a June 1898 column on true Americanism in October 1916 in light of “President Wilson’s charge of disloyalty against those who do not approve of his pro-British policies.” This selection noted that while Americans had largely hailed from Europe but as Americans, they “must not attempt to impose [their] own ancestry upon the nation. What binds us together as a nation in the

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<sup>3</sup> Cockran, speech at Madison Square Garden, Folder 2, Box 28, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; Cockran, speech to Committee on Foreign Affairs, December 19, 1919, Folder 3, Box 29, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; Denis McCarthy, “Why Not an Irish Republic? A Plea for the Complete Independence of Ireland,” pg. 11, Folder 4, Box 2, Denis Aloysius McCarthy Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

present generation is not identity of race, but community of interests, institutions, and aspirations. It is not the past we have in common so much as the future.”<sup>4</sup>

For the American Irish, pure Americanism meant spreading American ideals across the globe and fighting for oppressed peoples everywhere. It was necessary to “unite Americans wherever the issue is America,” said the *Pilot*, which proclaimed that since Americans of all races and creeds had united to win the war, they needed to do so again so as not to lose the peace. According to the *Monitor*, true Americanism meant the application of Christ’s principles to all nations of the Earth. The real American spirit needed to be applied to all nations, “insofar as this may be done with imperfect human nature it is being attempted in America today.”<sup>5</sup>

The Irish Americanized the situation in Ireland. They claimed that the American war effort was idealistic, a war to free the downtrodden peoples of the world. And this was similar to the Irish push for autonomy against the British government because Ireland was one of these downtrodden nations. A typical assertion by the *Irish World* claimed that it would be “more American” to fight a war to “Americanize Europe – to give freedom to all nations now in bondage.” The Irish and American republics were seen in the same light: “On such high moral grounds is placed Ireland’s right to be heard in her appeal to be true to herself and to her noble traditions by recognizing the Irish Republic.” The *Irish Press* also equated the Irish and American fates. “No American who understands the situation in Ireland expects Ireland to fight for English tyranny” the *Press* exclaimed, pointing out that Ireland, “in resisting English aggression is fighting for

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<sup>4</sup> Denis McCarthy, “Why Not an Irish Republic? A Plea for the Complete Independence of Ireland,” pg. 11, Folder 4, Box 2, Denis Aloysius McCarthy Papers, Burns Library, Boston College; *Irish World*, October 7, 1916. Bracketed text added.

<sup>5</sup> *Pilot*, December 13, 1919; *Monitor*, May 20, 1916. These kinds of statements implied a vague notion of equality for all.

the same principles for which America is fighting.” As Irish-American soldier John J. Corcoran said, “The Irish are loyal in every case to America, because we are loyal to them.”<sup>6</sup>

The Irish equated those opposed or apathetic to Irish freedom with British imperialists and latched onto a literal interpretation of Wilson’s war objectives. The *Irish Press* stated that “Americans who are true to the principles upon which this great Republic was founded” remained true to the principles by which Wilson justified American intervention in favor of national self-determination for small nations such as Ireland. As William Cardinal O’Connell told the Catholic Women’s League in 1920, “The Irish question is a question not of Ireland only, certainly not of England only, but, I hold, of all mankind, because it is a question of justice, and, I hold, especially an American question. It is a question, above all, in which Americans as Americans must be doubly interested.” America had two options, according to O’Connell: “play the game of hypocrisy which the British government has continued to play,” or to insist upon the freedom of Ireland, as American war aims clearly stated. After the American Declaration of War, Cockran spoke in Rochester, New York on the American responsibilities. “Now this country has drawn the sword to extend over the whole world the justice which Abraham Lincoln enthroned throughout the United States,” he said, continuing that “the

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<sup>6</sup> *Irish World*, January 26, 1918; January 10, 1920; *Irish Press*, May 25, 1918; John J. Corcoran in *Irish Press*, June 8, 1918. The *Irish Press* was published in Philadelphia by Joseph McGarrity, a longtime member of Clan na Gael. He broke with Cohalan in 1919 and supported Eamon de Valera and a unified, 32-county Irish Republic – see F.M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, 158-159. See also Sean Cronin, *The McGarrity Papers: Revelations of the Irish Revolutionary Movement in Ireland and America, 1900-1940* (New York: Clan na Gael, 1972).

issue is the same, the theatre is broadened. That for which we fought triumphantly in the United States we must now fight decisively, triumphantly throughout the whole world.”<sup>7</sup>

The American universalism of the First World War era mirrored that of the Civil War era; the Irish-American conception of citizenship had not changed. Being an American was cosmopolitan. Anyone who embraced the principles of America could be an American. As Denis McCarthy stated in a November 1915 speech to the Charitable Irish Society in Boston, “One of the first lessons I received in American patriotism” was that “I was in America because long before I had landed in America I was truly American, and I think that is not untrue of many.” One need not be Irish to be a friend of Irish freedom either. In the spirit of American internationalism, a FOIF flyer entitled “Who are the Friends of Irish Freedom?” stated that “All Americans of all races and creeds, who believe in the doctrines of Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln for the liberty of mankind are eligible for membership.” In fact, the flyer pointed out that “No American, who is living in loyal adherence to America’s basic ideals of liberty and Justice, can stand outside the ranks of the FRIENDS OF IRISH FREEDOM.” In other words, being an American was open to all, and since being a true American meant working toward an independent Irish republic, being a friend of Irish freedom was all-inclusive as well. A poem by Irish-American soldier John O’Keefe, of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York, entitled “Blaustein of the Irish” demonstrated this universal Americanism through the prism of war itself. After assisting in a rescue operation at a place called Rouge

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<sup>7</sup> *Irish Press*, January 18, 1919; December 6, 1919; Address of William Cardinal O’Connell to Catholic Women’s League, 1920, Folder 2, Box 21, Friends of Irish Freedom Papers (hereafter FOIF Papers), American Irish Historical Society (hereafter AIHS); Cockran, “America in Arms,” William Bourke Cockran Papers, Folder 6, Box 28, NYPL. For a discussion of the life and accomplishments of William Cardinal O’Connell, see James M. O’Toole, *Militant and Triumphant: William Henry O’Connell and the Catholic Church in Boston, 1859-1944* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). See also William Cardinal O’Connell, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934).

Bouquet, Jewish Sergeant Abram Blaustein was the inspiration behind O’Keefe’s poem that opened “You talk about your melting pot, The crucible of man-Where Celt and Saxon, Slav and Scot Are made American.”<sup>8</sup>

The Irish also celebrated their contributions to the First World War, most notably the performance of the “Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>” (which had been reclassified as the 165<sup>th</sup> Infantry) of New York under Father Francis Duffy. During the First World War, ethnic units were discouraged (this may have encouraged the Irish to look to history to celebrate the contributions of Irish-American units). As a result, the vast majority of the eighteen percent of foreign-born troops (white troops anyway) were scattered throughout the ranks of the armed forces. Even the “Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>” felt the effects, as many Italian, Polish, and German soldiers filled out its ranks. According to Father Duffy, the troops in his unit were “Irish by adoption, Irish by association, or Irish by conviction.”<sup>9</sup>

The American Irish even touted their own Americanization efforts. Lawrence, Massachusetts (an “immigrant city” full of Irish) became so well known for its Americanization efforts regarding immigrants that the city’s School Committee was consulted in the publication of a book called “The American Plan for Education in

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<sup>8</sup> Denis McCarthy, speech transcribed in “Meeting Minutes,” November 15, 1915, Folder 4, Box 2, Charitable Irish Society Records (hereafter CIS Records), Burns Library, Boston College; “Who are the Friends of Irish Freedom?” Irish National Bureau clipping file (undated), Folder 3, Box 22, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Demeter, *Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>*, 237-238. The Charitable Irish Society of Boston was founded in 1737. A moderate organization fond of celebrating Irish-American history, the CIS sent a delegation to the 1918 Irish Race Convention in New York and pleaded with opponents of the 1921 treaty to accept the terms and avoid an Irish Civil War, to no avail – see Michael F. Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 71-73. For a brief internal history, see Charles T. Burke, *The Silver Key: A History of the Charitable Irish Society Founded in Boston 1737* (Boston: Charitable Irish Society, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), 19-21; Farwell, *Over There*, 97-99. For more on this unit, see Francis P. Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story: A Tale of Humor and Heroism, of Life and Death with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1919) and Stephen L. Harris, *Duffy’s War: Father Francis Duffy, Wild Bill Donovan, and the Irish Fighting 69<sup>th</sup> in World War I* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2006). For a first-person account of the unit in battle, see Albert M. Ettinger and A. Churchill Ettinger, *A Doughboy with the Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>: A Remembrance of World War I* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1992).

Citizenship,” which soon reached national acclaim. The goals of the program and the book were to “keep the republic safe” and to “permeate every course of study with loyalty to American ideals.” History courses were designed to teach “love and loyalty for America,” while civics classes were to instill a “devotion to the Community” and literature classes were to rouse an eagerness for all things “which the American spirit holds dear.” The chief principles of this plan were “‘sacrifice for country,’ belief in America as ‘the land of opportunity,’ patriotism, faith in American democracy, obedience to law, and love of country.” According to this Americanization plan, “internationalism...[was to] supplement Americanism, not destroy it.” This internationalist brand of Americanization was not without its critics. The nativist Guardians of Liberty issued anti-Catholic pamphlets, and when the Knights of Columbus spoke out against them, the Chamber of Commerce blasted the Knights for their “malicious, unpatriotic, and un-American efforts...to stir up religious strife or bigotry.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Hyphenism Un-American**

Any form of nativism remained un-American throughout both periods. By the 1910s, an anti-immigrant movement vaguely referred to as “hyphenism” labeled anyone who attached an ethnic designation to their national identity as somehow not one hundred percent American. In the First World War era, the Irish labeled “hyphenism” as un-American, it contrasting American universalism. Anyone who implied that being an Irish-American or a German-American meant that person was somehow less American was guilty of this “hyphenism.” It conflicted with Irish-American views on

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<sup>10</sup> Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 196-197.

internationalism, and it was characteristic of a country like Britain, not America. Woodrow Wilson was perhaps the most notable anti-German, anti-Irish, and anti-Catholic dogmatist. After 1915, Wilson began more frequently attacking “hyphenism.” During his Third Annual Message to Congress, Wilson accused those born under foreign flags (one in three Americans was either a first or second-generation citizen) of injecting “the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life.” Although it was a rather dull speech, one observer noted that Wilson’s condemnation of hyphenism received the most applause. The Irish press took note of these statements and portrayed Wilson as an un-American, anti-Irish bigot.<sup>11</sup> The targets of this hostility were primarily German Americans and Irish Americans. By 1916, the German-American press was virtually unanimous in its loathing of President Wilson. Wilson equated hyphenated Americans as foreign subversives, as inherently un-American. A German-American paper in Milwaukee asserted that they were not trying to “Germanize” America but rather Americanize it. In order to do this, they needed to “de-Briticize [sic] it.”<sup>12</sup> Irish-American nationalists felt the same way.

As a historian, Woodrow Wilson had denigrated immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, arguing in his 1902 book *A History of the American People* that these newcomers from Poland, Hungary, and Italy were “men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence.” Noting that they poured into the United States in larger numbers each year, it seemed to Wilson that “the countries of the south of Europe were disburdening themselves of the more sordid and

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<sup>11</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Louis L. Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1964), 64-65.

hapless elements of their population.” Voters of such heritage called upon Wilson to rewrite his passages and issue an apology, which he agreed to do. After his re-election in 1916, however, a new edition of the book came out with the passages under fire left unchanged.<sup>13</sup> The geographic origins of the Irish differed from those “new immigrants,” but they were still Catholic.

In his St. Patrick’s Day Address in 1923, Charitable Irish Society President Louis Watson spoke out against the nativist “hysteria following the Great War...against all who cannot claim membership in a mythical, Nordic race.” These nativists, seeking to divide the American people against each other, were actually “masquerading as the defender of American institutions and preserver of American ideals” while in reality they were committed to “anti-American tenets and tendencies and are a veritable menace to our representative form of government.” In speaking out against restrictive immigration proposals, Watson affirmed that “the title ‘American’ belongs really to the person imbued with the spirit of America, the person who believes in the principles of America, and puts them first above all else. Let us remember that true Americanism is really the uniting of older and newer Americans in a greater appreciation of the principles of democratic government as represented by this republic for the common welfare of all.” Watson went on to say that true Americanism meant the “contribution of both newer and older Americans to a better America, not necessarily a static and unchangeable form of government, but rather a new America, a broader, better, and more enriched America, which shall be the outcome of the contribution of all its children, both native and adopted.” Watson also mocked the fake patriotism of the nativists by exclaiming he had “scant patience for the so-called 100 percent American, - the professional profiteer, the

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<sup>13</sup> Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy*, 62-63.

person who professes belief in the illusion that to be a true American a man must forget the ideals and traditions of the land of his fathers, must obliterate from his heart all traces of affection for the home of his ancestors. We feel, on the contrary, that the members of our Society are better Americans by the very fact of that membership.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Pilot* refuted the notion that native Americans held a superior brand of Americanism under the headline “Un-American.” The *Pilot* found this absurd claim to be “neither native nor American and belongs to the same category as the venerable dictum that the moon is made of green cheese.” According to the same article, “if the word American means anything definite as applied to the United States, it is as different from the word, English, as the Atlantic Ocean and the Declaration of Independence would indicate.” The native Americans kept trying to de-legitimize Americans not of Anglo-Saxon blood by treating them like freedmen who could vote, thus preventing them from becoming “in the inner sense a real American.”<sup>15</sup>

A piece reprinted from the *National Hibernian* asserted on the eve of American entry into the First World War that “the only patriotic ‘hyphenated’ Americans in time of war are the ‘All-Americans.’ The pride in Irish blood is forgotten in the duty of American citizenship.” The author went on to point out that “true Americans of our race” have fought in all major American wars and that “some of the most brilliant pages in our story are also some of the proudest pages in American history.” As the *Citizen* (Chicago) pointed out, “There is not a man or woman in this land that does not know that Irish-Americans have no hyphen in their patriotism. Whether born here or elsewhere they know but one allegiance when their country calls,” and they emphasized this repeatedly.

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<sup>14</sup> Louis Watson speech to CIS, March 17, 1923, Folder 47, Box 3, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>15</sup> *Pilot*, October 9, 1915.

“We know that true citizenship is of the spirit, and that a true Irishman must also be a true American” said the *Irish Standard*, which pointed out that the Irish in America were poised to carry on the traditions of the Irish Brigade bequeathed to them by Civil War heroes Meagher, Corcoran, and Shields.<sup>16</sup>

In a December 1914 issue of the *Irish Standard*, Judge Dennis Dwyer contended that the spirit of bigotry was un-American. Impugning no other man for their particular religious creed, he proudly proclaimed himself a Catholic. Dwyer rejected the notion that somehow Catholicism was un-American; he labeled those who accused the Irish of being un-American as the real culprits. Claiming that no partisan politics would ever be preached from the Catholic pulpit, nor would any Catholic inquire as to the religious creed of any political candidate, as “such inquiry is foreign to his principles of American citizenship.” Dwyer regretted that those who attacked Catholics obviously did not feel the same way, but felt that the mass of educated citizens “would not be influenced by such un-American scoundrelism.” Dwyer reasoned that being a Catholic did not mean one was more American than anyone else but rather placed everyone on equal footing. He pointed out that George Washington had many Catholic friends and that Catholics had served America well in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the recent Spanish-American War.<sup>17</sup>

The *Gaelic American* attacked those who labeled Irish and/or German-Americans as “hyphenated Americans.” Wilson and others used this designation to marginalize and undermine the Americanism of the Irish and Germans, but the *Gaelic American* went on

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<sup>16</sup> *Irish Standard*, April 7, 1917; *Citizen*, October 12, 1917. Born in Ireland, James Shields served as a general in the Civil War and as a U.S. Senator – see William Henry Condon, *Life of Major-General James Shields, Hero of Three Wars and Senator From Three States* (Chicago: Blakeley Printing, 1900).

<sup>17</sup> *Irish Standard*, December 26, 1914.

the offensive and attacked the Americanism of others. One especially outspoken critic of the Irish and Germans was Andrew Carnegie; the *Gaelic American* labeled him and his followers “by the odious designation, Carnegie-Americans.” As the paper said, “There are good and bad hyphenated Americans.” When a New York trust company suspended its German-American employees “because they were Germans,” the *Irish Standard* attacked their patriotism: “There is no cheaper form of patriotism than to deprive a man of his bread and butter simply because he belongs to a nation with which we are on unfriendly terms.”<sup>18</sup>

Irish papers opportunistically chastised anti-Catholic legal measures as un-American. For example, the *Pilot* called a proposed bill authorizing inspection of private institutions like hospitals and schools for sanitation, cleanliness, and efficiency an “un-American measure” because they perceived it as being aimed specifically at Catholic institutions. The bill was “a veiled and unprovoked effort...to encourage a vicious and unwarranted anti-Catholic sentiment in the American State” which contradicted the very meaning of America, as “a harbor of refuge for the oppressed of every land” for those who wished to “worship God after the dictates of his own conscience.” The *Pilot* also went on the offensive against the Guardians of Liberty and other so-called “Patriots,” who should have followed America’s great statesmen and scholars in exalting the Catholics of America.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Gaelic American*, March 13, 1915; *Irish Standard*, February 24, 1917. A Scottish immigrant to the United States, Carnegie was a notorious Anglophile. In his many writings, he glorified the British and emphasized that four-fifths of the American population traced their roots back to Great Britain (the other fifth was German). Carnegie was not overtly bigoted, but Irish nationalists clearly irked him. He rejected the notion of Irish separatism and recommended that the British look to the American Constitution and the legal status of the states under American federalism for the appropriate level of Irish autonomy – see David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 273-274

<sup>19</sup> *Pilot*, February 27, 1915; May 15, 1915.

The *Leader* (San Francisco) also attacked President Woodrow Wilson for trying to de-legitimize the American citizenship of adopted U.S. citizens. Wilson claimed that the U.S. only offered citizenship to aliens out of pure benevolence, but being an American was a symbiotic relationship, explained the *Leader*. The United States needed immigrants to fill the land and bring “progress, prosperity, liberality” to it. American citizenship, therefore, constituted a “two-sided contract.” As the debate over American entry into the Great War and then the League of Nations wore on, Wilson ratcheted up his attacks on so-called “hyphenated Americans.” This went hand in hand with Wilson’s attempt to perpetuate the British tyranny in Egypt, India, and Ireland, claimed many Irish Americans. They attacked Wilson’s imperial and hierarchical notions of citizenship, in which American Anglo-Saxons outranked fellow residents. This was a Wilsonian appeal to Know-Nothingism, “an un-American attempt to divide the American people” and relegate naturalized citizens to second-class status. These assertions by Wilson were “so un-American as to be utterly ineffective,” claimed the *Gaelic American*, which noted that “the only men in America who have a divided allegiance and who put the interests of another country before those of their own are his own friends, the Anglomaniacs, the Pilgrims.” The *Gaelic American* derisively called Wilson a triple hyphenate, or “an Irish-English-American.”<sup>20</sup>

An ideological cousin to this hyphenism movement was the “Americanization” movement, which had begun to crystallize around 1900. Americans had always felt that immigrants would assimilate but by the turn of the twentieth century, many began doubting this premise. Some Americanization campaigns were altruistic in nature, even

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<sup>20</sup> *Leader*, December 11, 1915; *Gaelic American*, October 11, 1919; November 13, 1915; December 18, 1915.

if they were trying to convert immigrants into a manageable working class. For example, Jane Addams led programs that taught immigrants American culture and language and thus prepared them to succeed in American life. The first sentence that Henry Ford's factory school had students master was "I am a good American." The Committee on Public Information (CPI) assigned Josephine Roche (a liberal proponent of the Americanization movement) to head up the Division of the Foreign-born, which set up "loyalty leagues" in America's ethnic communities and sponsored rallies and pilgrimages. A notable example was the trip to Mount Vernon, where Irish-American tenor John McCormack performed "Battle Hymn of the Republic" while thirty-three ethnic groups filed by in reverence. Yet for the most part, the nativists trumped up fears regarding "hyphenated Americans" and by 1918, the xenophobic One Hundred Percent Americanization campaign had drowned out the altruistic campaigns of those like Addams. Americanization thinkers rejected the inevitable change coming to America; they refused to accept the reality of a transnational America and instead clung to a bygone era that had never really existed. The *Citizen* (Chicago) would later say that for an Irishman to act with One Hundred Per Cent Americanism, an Irishman would have to support Irish bond sales to fund an independent Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that one-third of the American population was either foreign-born or had a foreign-born parent made native-born, flag-waving hawks nervous. There was a conscious effort, particularly after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, to "Americanize" these foreigners in order to root out any subversives and homogenize cultural loyalty to the United States. The term "Americanize" itself actually dates to this era. School

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<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 63-68; Roger Daniels, *Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 92; *Citizen*, February 20, 1920. – see Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 14.

curricula designed to “Americanize” the new immigrant populations by instilling “American” values into students and teaching them to be proper civic Americans ensued. The debate over how to impart this common political heritage, as well as how to define it, was the subject of much discussion.<sup>22</sup>

In 1918, the American government even overtly proposed “Americanization as a War Measure.” In a speech to an Americanization conference, Interior Secretary Franklin K. Lane encouraged audience members to act as prophets and missionaries in going forth to “preach” to immigrants on “American ideals, standards, and citizenship.” The three main tenets of the Americanization movement were to teach children English, American history and civics. This would assist immigrants in becoming functioning American citizens prepared for the rigors of American democracy. Historian Jeffrey E. Mirel argued that as a result, the Americanizers often operated with the best interests of the immigrants at heart; they were civic American nationalists seeking to include them and foster a “patriotic pluralism” whereby immigrants maintained the cultural traditions that they wished to keep while assimilating into a civic American nation. The anti-German hysteria of the First World War era brought a cloud of suspicion over all immigrant groups and encouraged Americanizers to tout “One Hundred Percent Americanization” programs.<sup>23</sup>

Irish Catholic newspapers proclaimed that instead of their religion being un-American, Catholicism and Americanism actually reinforced one another. Catholicism

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<sup>22</sup> Paula Fass, *Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-10; Dietrich Herrmann, “Making Americans: Conceptions of the Ideal American in Campaigns to Americanize New Immigrants in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century” in *The American Nation, National Identity, and Nationalism*, ed. Knud Krakau (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 169-184.

<sup>23</sup> Rosemary C. Salomone, *True American: Language, Identity, and the Education of Immigrant Children* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 32; Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 4-11, 23.

was actually more conducive to Americanism than any other religion. In a piece on the value of the parish school, the *Irish Standard* stressed that love of God and love of country were two sides of the same coin. Even the most staunch proponents of the division of church and state should support parish schools, for spiritual and civic instruction reinforced each other. “Patriotism means that love of country which prompts a strict observance of law and proper respect for civil authority,” according to the *Irish Standard*, and “The Catholic, if he be true to the principles taught him in his parish school is the best type of American.” The *Pilot* even claimed that the Catholic parochial school system would turn the students into “the consolation of the church and the flower of American citizenship.” The *Pilot* called Catholics “The Truest Patriots,” who remained steadfast patriots in wartime and during peace because “patriotism and piety are twin lessons taught them by their church.” Florida’s governor’s refusal to allow any Catholic teachers into public schools was thusly branded as “utterly un-American.”<sup>24</sup>

The *Western Catholic* attacked a group in Charlotte, North Carolina that had met with the purpose of forming a new political party adhering to the main tenet of “America for Americans.” Since two Catholic teachers had recently been removed from their jobs as schoolteachers, the paper took the opportunity to lambast these nativists for causing these problems. The paper asked “How many of the cowardly thugs of Charlotte, who persecuted and hounded two innocent American girls till they forced them from their chosen profession of teaching in the public schools because of their membership in the Catholic Church, believe in America for Americans?”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Irish Standard*, September 30, 1916; *Pilot*, September 5, 1914; April 27, 1918; October 12, 1918.

<sup>25</sup> *Western Catholic*, September 4, 1914.

Father John J. McClorey characterized an Amendment to the Michigan Constitution, which sought to close down parochial schools as “un-American,” arguing that religious schools were actually more American than public schools on account of their exercise of the distinctly American religious freedom. Citing the writings of prominent Americans like Madison and Jefferson, along with the freedom of religion clauses in the First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment, and even the League of Nations, McClorey asked readers to consider the issue when voting. He had made his case by allying his cause with “all these genuinely American persons and things.”<sup>26</sup>

Cardinal O’Connell of Boston championed his own American credentials when giving an address on “True Patriotism” in 1915. In contrast to the “so-called Americans” who attacked American Catholics, O’Connell implored his listeners to “stand firm against this false Americanism, stand firm for your faith and your civil rights and all true Americans will stand with you.” In Denver, the *Catholic Register* complained that no Catholics had been allowed onto the committee in charge of bringing the Liberty Bell to Denver. The *San Francisco Monitor*, with a figurative roll of the eyes, referred to these anti-Catholic societies as “patriots.” The paper would claim that due to the “temperament and tradition” of their religion, Catholics made “better American citizens.” The *Tablet* felt that requiring a literacy test for immigrants was un-American. “There is a Mayflower reaching our shores every day of the week, and the steerage list of passengers carries names which may become the future glory of our national history,” said the *Tablet*.

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<sup>26</sup> *Michigan Catholic*, September 16, 1920.

Using “an arbitrary test of fitness is dangerously un-American,” especially since there would be plenty of literate anarchists seeking to destroy America.<sup>27</sup>

The *Michigan Catholic* noted that there was too much talk about disloyal foreign elements in the U.S. After all, these groups had stellar records of loyal participation in American wars, and all of the talk about disloyal foreign elements “smacks unpleasantly of Know-Nothingism and Ku Kluxism.” While it was a good idea to Americanize foreigners, it was an equally good idea to “Americanize some of our Americans.”<sup>28</sup>

The *Western Catholic* tackled the subject of “who and what caused the war” in a May 1917 article, and it traced the roots of the conflict back centuries. It asserted that “the horrible war now blighting the world and cursing humanity is directly traceable to the religious revolution of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther stands before the judgment seat of humanity and of humanity’s God as the father of the evils responsible for the butchery of nations.” The article cited Dr. Conde B. Pallen, who claimed that the preservation of American democracy was contingent upon “nation-wide conversion to Catholicism.” In response to a St. Louis newspaper saying that Martin Luther would have made a good American, the *Western Catholic* exclaimed “Luther a good American! God save the mark!” It went on to again blame Luther for the troubles in Europe, saying that “The vile seed sown by the rebel monk, Luther, grew and grew-spread and spread- and conditions today in Europe are the result of Luther’s devilish work.” The *Western Catholic* then quoted a non-Catholic paper in Toronto claiming that Luther supported the divine right of kings and felt it necessary to always side with princes over the people.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cardinal O’Connell in *Michigan Catholic*, May 27, 1915; *Monitor*, June 12, 1915; July 17, 1915; *Tablet*, December 23, 1916.

<sup>28</sup> *Michigan Catholic*, October 6, 1921

<sup>29</sup> *Western Catholic*, May 4, 1917; September 28, 1917.

The Irish contrasted their Americanism and patriotism with what they perceived as the skin-deep, flag-waving patriotism of their political adversaries in America, such as the Guardians of Liberty and other nativist organizations. The *Irish Standard* called the Guardians of Liberty flag wavers who never showed up when duty called. “They talk of patriotism and religion, when they have as much religion and patriotism in them as the odoriferous little animal whose skin is valuable, but whose color is obnoxious,” said the *Standard*. These “sneaking, hidden hypocrites” had not volunteered for service like the “gallant Irish Sixty-Ninth Infantry...which was the first to respond to the President’s order calling the militia to colors.” While the *Standard* admitted that most Americans opposed going to war in support of Wilson’s Mexican policy, they still felt that every “good American” would do his duty and fight in order to “uphold and defend the honor of the American flag, and renew the proof that the Catholics of this country are all real Americans pure and unalloyed, first, last, and all the time.”<sup>30</sup>

The *Pilot* called for a civic patriotism to emanate from every American citizen, both in peacetime and wartime. This brand of patriotism consisted not of “the waving of the national emblem nor in bombastic utterances on national greatness” but rather in revering the Constitution and respecting civil authority. Loyalty to God and country went hand in hand in fashioning a Christian manhood which formed the basis for American patriotism. The *Pilot* also attacked the phony Americanism of anti-Catholic bigots. Questioning how any Catholic doctrines actually conflicted with the notions of American citizenship, the *Pilot* doubted the legitimacy of “a certain category of religionists who imagine that they are America, that the government and institutions of our country belong

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<sup>30</sup> *Irish Standard*, July 1, 1916.

to their precious selves, but their pretensions are as empty and unfounded as their accusation against Catholics.”<sup>31</sup>

The *Tablet* leveled charges of fake patriotism against all anti-Catholic bigots, especially the Guardians of Liberty. Urging the nomination of General Nelson A. Miles for President, these “pseudo-patriots” endorsed the idea that being a Catholic and being an American were mutually exclusive. “Catholics are good Americans,” printed the *Tablet*, claiming that “there is nothing in either Americanism or catholicity that is antagonistic to the main characteristics of the other.” As J.P. Curran stated in a letter to the *Tablet*, those who continually questioned the Americanism of Catholics in the United States themselves had an Americanism “open to serious question.” The author recommended that Catholics become far more aggressive in asserting their rights as Americans. Too many Catholics had become apologetic and had been “led astray” by the Americanism campaigns of the nativists.<sup>32</sup>

Irish periodicals frequently contrasted their pure American patriotism with the spurious chauvinism of the nativists. The *Brooklyn Tablet* ran a column on “pseudo-patriotism” in February 1915, arguing that the Guardians of Liberty and other anti-Catholic organizations were “imitation patriots.” These bigoted organizations sought to have Catholic children taught that their religious faith prohibit them from rising to the highest position in the nation, and the *Tablet* openly wondered if there could be “a more dastardly insult be given to “Old Glory” than is contained in this anti-American doctrine?” During the war, the *Tablet* noted that most of the “bogus patriots” had been individuals but afterward, there were far more organizations taking over as “bogus

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<sup>31</sup> *Pilot*, February 17, 1917; *Pilot* printed in *Irish Standard*, August 19, 1916.

<sup>32</sup> *Tablet*, June 24, 1916; J.P. Curran, Jr. to *Tablet*, November 27, 1916, printed December 2, 1916.

champions of Americanism.” Labeling their opponents as Reds, Radicals, Bolsheviks, and Anarchists, they tried to use Americanism but were really “pseudo-Americanism” schemers. The *Michigan Catholic* ran a story in July 1920 on the “Bogus Patriots” of the war era and its aftermath. These nativists who unfairly and disingenuously labeled their opponents anarchists and Bolsheviks ran “pseudo Americanism schemes” in attempts to harm good citizenship “through the distrust that is naturally engendered and the wrong conception of American ideals created by the efforts and example of these bogus champions of Americanism.” Working “under the guise of patriotism,” these nativists had actually undermined true patriotism and Americanism.<sup>33</sup>

Even the nationalistic papers like the *Leader* (which had opposed American entry into the Great War) steadfastly supported the American troops. Of course, they highlighted this rhetoric as much as possible. “Our boys are over there fighting for us – fighting so that we and the rest of the world may live in a state of peace and happiness, and that are children may live likewise,” said the *Leader*, and “if we can’t do anything else to help our country in its hour of need, we can at least preserve our spirit of true Americanism, and aid with our prayers for the success of our arms.” Advertisements in the *Leader* for Liberty Bonds urged readers, “Don’t Desert Him NOW.” Articles also directed readers to purchase liberty bonds and implored the Kaiser to give up. The *Pilot* also urged its readers to purchase Liberty Bonds as a way of supporting the war effort even if they were unable to give their life for the cause. The *Tablet* challenged the “dirty tribe of mouthers [sic]” to see who would join the war effort first. It would be a race

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<sup>33</sup> *Tablet*, February 6, 1915; July 24, 1920; *Michigan Catholic*, July 15, 1920.

between the Guardians of Liberty and the Knights of Columbus to the flag once the war started: “we dare them!”<sup>34</sup>

### **England Un-American**

During the winter of 1917-1918, the snow in eastern France was especially heavy, and the American government experienced difficulties in supplying all troops with adequate winter clothing. Major Frederick Palmer called it the Valley Forge of the American Expeditionary Force. When some British tunics arrived for frosty American troops (complete with British buttons), many in the Fighting 69<sup>th</sup> refused to accept them and turned to lighting them on fire. World War I heightened tensions within the Irish-American community, as their loyalty again came under fire, and differences between moderates and radical nationalists hardened against the backdrop of the war. The sinking of the *Lusitania* exacerbated these tensions and made it difficult to justify German actions, especially when Irish-American loyalty was being questioned. The nationalistic Irish-American press basically labeled Woodrow Wilson an unpatriotic British stooge. Arguing that the crew took an unfairly large percentage of the lifeboats at the expense of women and children, the *Gaelic American* reported that 302 crew and only 465 passengers were saved. The *Gaelic American* suggested Wilson to take this “horrible record of cowardice and selfishness” into consideration when he took action and warned him that “it is the real American people, not the New York Anglomaniac newspapers, who will be the final judges.” While Wilson allowed a British war on American commercial ships, it somehow objected to Germany shooting down the *Lusitania*, which

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<sup>34</sup> *Leader*, August 10, 1918; October 5, 1918; October 19, 1918; *Pilot*, June 2, 1917; *Tablet*, February 10, 1917.

the *Gaelic American* claimed had only descended so quickly because it was so weighted down with explosives. The *Gaelic American* mocked Wilson's "America First" pronouncements, claiming that the real proponents of "America First" were the advocates of strict neutrality that the president regularly denounced. After the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the *Irish Standard* recommended that Americans exercise caution in travelling on foreign ships after such a "tremendous assault on shipping in English waters." The *Independent* even quoted the *Gaelic American* in calling the British "murderers" of the *Lusitania* victims.<sup>35</sup>

For the Irish, the term "England" encapsulated the entire spectrum of un-American characteristics. While un-Americanism had evolved to reflect America's entry into the arena of world affairs by the 1910s, it still carried anti-aristocratic and anti-nativist overtones. It was even more anti-English. In the era of the First World War, everything American was un-English and everything English was un-American. FOIF and other Irish-American organizations worked tirelessly advocating the American credentials of their constituencies. Irish National Bureau Chief Daniel T. O'Connell's pamphlet on "Owen Wister, Advocate of Racial Hatred: An Unpatriotic American Who Seeks to Destroy American Traditions," attacked the Americanism of the author. It

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<sup>35</sup> Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 99; Thomas J. Rowland, "Strained Neutrality: Irish-American Catholics, Woodrow Wilson, and the *Lusitania*," *Eire-Ireland* 30, no. 4(1996): 58-59, 72; *Gaelic American*, May 15, 1915; May 22, 1915; November 27, 1915; *Irish Standard*, May 15, 1915; *Butte Independent*, May 22, 1915. William Jennings Bryan's resignation in protest of Wilson's reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania* made him a hero to many Irish-American nationalists – see Murphy, *History of the Friendly Sons*, 430. Among the nearly 1200 victims of the *Lusitania* were 128 Americans, despite the clear warnings from the German government not to board ships flying the Union Jack. While the ship was carrying a cache of guns, no evidence existed that it was transporting Canadian troops, despite German claims to the contrary. After intensifying and situating American sympathies squarely against German in 1915, American troops remembered the incident with war cries dedicated to the *Lusitania* in 1917 and 1918. There was plenty of blame to go around, to the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. A propaganda war broke out in the press for ownership over the incident, with the mainstream American press labeling the Germans as barbaric Huns and pushing for war. Of course, the Irish-American press had a much different take on the events - see Diana Preston, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy* (New York: Walker & Company, 2002), 1-5.

accused Wister of trying to make “Americans love England more by trying to persuade them to love America less,” and while Wister “professes to speak as an American,” he exuded an Americanism that “would have America secondary and subordinate to England.”<sup>36</sup>

Even mundane matters such as patriotic American songs were subject to this dichotomy. The *Gaelic American* celebrated the centennial of the “Star-Spangled Banner” by blasting suggestions from certain segments of the population to replace or abridge the national anthem with the song “My Country ‘tis of Thee.” The *Gaelic American* rejected this notion because the latter tune is set to the same melody as the British national anthem “God Save the King,” thus making this a “treasonable suggestion” to Anglicize the national anthem of the United States. The *New York Tablet* reported on James J. McCabe taking the lyrics of “America, ‘tis of thee” and setting them to a different tune, not the same music as “God Save the King.” The *Tablet* predicted that soon the new version of the song would overtake the old one “and supply what the nation has long sought, an ‘America’ made in America.” The *Irish World* rejected the song “America, My country ‘tis of Thee” because of the line calling America the “Land of the Pilgrims’ Pride.” Only a few New England residents of Puritan descent could actually call America the “Land of the Pilgrims’ Pride.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell, “Owen Wister: Advocate of Racial Hatred: an Unpatriotic American who seeks to destroy American Traditions” May 1920, Folder 4, Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS. Owen Wister served as the Vice President of the Immigration Restriction League, an organization founded in 1894 in Boston to work toward the mitigation of immigration of undesirable peoples, notably Catholics. Wister’s work itself can be interpreted as exclusive as well. His early novels in particular communicated a vision of a utilitarian American West, untainted by the squalor and filth of eastern cities. During the First World War era, he published two jingoistic books as well, *The Pentecost of Calamity* and *Neighbors Henceforth* – see Darwin Payne, *Owen Wister: Chronicler of the West, Gentleman of the East* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), xi-xiii, 229. Wister also once called New Immigrants “dingy whites” – see Guterl, *The Color of Race in America*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Gaelic American*, September 12, 1914; *Tablet*, August 21, 1915; *Irish World*, May 18, 1918.

Irish newspapers instructed their readers that English songs were un-American. The *Leader* articulated its view of Americanism by telling the story of Lieutenant-Commander F. F. Evans, who commanded the Naval Training Station at Newport, Rhode Island. The *Leader* was heaping praise on Evans, in an article entitled “A True American,” for putting his “taboo” on “that detestable English beer-hall marching song, “It’s a Long Wye to Tipperarye.” Commander Evans deserved “the congratulations of every American worthy of that title,” according to the *Leader*, which also stated that the American Navy “is fortunate in having on its rolls a man of his convictions.” Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels had even “publicly approved of Evans’ patriotic stand.” This made perfect sense and was in compliance with Wilson’s neutrality proclamation, unlike the Anglophiles who played “God Save the King” at Golden Gate park every Sunday “in spite of all common decency in these war times.” James O’Hagan of the Ancient Order of Hibernians wrote to the *Tablet* in March 1921 to report the unanimous adoption of an AOH resolution proclaiming Governor Nathan Miller’s toast to King George of England as “un-American,” along with another unanimous resolution lauding the “staunch Americanism of Judge James T. O’Neill and his associates in refusing to stand while such a toast was being given.”<sup>38</sup>

The *Butte Independent* contrasted its view of Americanism, embodied by the Declaration of Independence, with “Cohanism,” a vague set of ideas and principles characterized broadly as un-American. The tenets of Cohanism included stigmatizing citizens who refused to sing “God Save the King” and opposed fighting with the British. Cohanism constituted the exact opposite of the Declaration of Independence, which of course, outlined the reasons for American independence and leveled charges of

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<sup>38</sup> *Leader*, December 12, 1914; *Tablet*, March 5, 1921.

“numberless atrocities perpetrated by the King and government of England upon the American people.” It was the British spirit of unlawfully searching American mails, blacklisting American merchants, and seizing American ships on the high seas. The “un-American philosophy which, while prattling of Democracy, would stifle every expression of public opinion and thereby destroy the fundamental status of the liberty of the citizen,” Cohanism was that “compound of bunk, hysteria, Anglomanism [sic] and deception which under the name of PATRIOTISM (?) has been inflicted upon the people of Butte since the outbreak of the European war and which of all the people are heartily sick and disgusted.” Cohanism was “that silly assertion of nativistic [sic] intolerance and Know-Nothingism which pretends to believe that love of Ireland is incompatible with American loyalty and patriotism.” It also included the “asinine propensity which seems to expect all foreign born citizens, especially Irishmen – if by any stretch of the imagination an Irishman can be considered a foreigner in America – to seek its gracious permission before going outside the city limits.”<sup>39</sup>

The Irish-American conception of America meant freedom, and the opposite of this American freedom was anything British. As Daniel T. O’Connell put it in a letter to British Ambassador to the United States Sir Auckland Geddes in May 1920, “Freedom, as understood in America, is the American brand of freedom, the freedom provided for in the Constitution of the United States and described in the Declaration of Independence. Do you wish Americans to believe there are two kinds of freedom?” he asked, since Britain intended to govern Ireland without the consent of the governed. Tying Irish and American objectives together, Irish-American Congressman William Bourke Cockran said in a speech to the Committee on Foreign Relations in November 1919, if you were to

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<sup>39</sup> *Butte Independent*, April 21, 1917. I have been unable to determine the origin of the term “Cohanism.”

pronounce your support for the principles which Americans celebrated every Fourth of July, “you would be arrested, you would be deported, you would be locked up in an English prison,” and no charges against you would ever be filed. In September 1920, FOIF National Secretary Diarmuid Lynch announced the passage of a resolution denouncing the British efforts to “impose on the Irish people the rule of an Alien Oligarchy, in violation of the American principle that “all Governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed.”<sup>40</sup> The British government was violating the universal and inalienable American rights of Ireland.

Ethnic semantics played a role in English un-Americanism. The *Leader* objected to the *San Francisco Examiner* printing a cartoon depicting a “melting pot” into which all the various nations dropped coins for the good of Belgium. While most of the nations of Earth were represented, no Briton was present; instead there was the “Anglo-American.” The paper continued by sarcastically noting, “Now why the offensive term “Anglo” should be tacked on to a respectable name like “American” surpasseth understanding.”<sup>41</sup>

FOIF called for boycotts of English goods and made the decision to participate in this embargo a test of American patriotism. “Real Americans could also bring custom tailors to a realization of staunch Americanism,” read the FOIF *News Letter* from August 21, 1920, pointing out that “there are woolen companies in America making cloth fully as good as that which comes from England...make them fly their American colors.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell to Sir Auckland Geddes, May 28, 1920, Folder 3, Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS; William Bourke Cockran, speech to Committee on Foreign Relations, November 13, 1919, Folder 3, Box 3, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; Diarmuid Lynch, September 20, 1920, National Bureau Clipping File (August-October 1920), Folder 4, Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS. Diarmuid Lynch spent time on both sides of the Atlantic. He contributed greatly to the cause of Irish independence while serving as FOIF secretary.

<sup>41</sup> *Leader*, November 14, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> “Tyranny, Not Law,” August 21, 1920, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

In a March 1918 column, the *Irish Press* derided certain elements in the American press with whom they disagreed, arguing that these “un-American” publications were “more anxious about the safety and integrity of the British Empire than about the honor of America.” They only supported the expansion of liberty so long as it did not “morally or materially injure the British Empire.” Since the *L.A. Times* was accusing any Irishman who supported the freedom of his native land a traitor to the United States government, the *L.A. Times* was branded as an un-American newspaper. According to the *Leader*, the majority of American papers supported the Irish position, but “that filthy, un-American, English-subsidized rag, the Los Angeles Times, continues to defame and malign the Gaelic race.” The *Butte Independent* had warned the American people not to be “misled by the bastard Americanism of King George’s Daily Press in this country” when the final push toward war was in full force.<sup>43</sup>

A March 1923 unanimous resolution from the FOIF National Council explained how the Anglophile press in America was driving a movement to limit immigration from all nations other than England. “This incipient movement to re-Anglicize America should be resisted by all true Americans” the resolution stated, especially those who were descendants of American Revolutionary patriots. The *Leader* vigorously attacked Anglo-Americanism, which it deemed “the meanest thing on earth today.” While the president claimed the United States was fighting for democracy and Anglophiles professed that America faced a threat from German militarism, the *Leader* adduced that the true threat to the United States was English naval prowess, which controlled the Panama Canal and

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<sup>43</sup> *Irish Press*, March 30, 1918; *Leader*, March 22, 1919; *Butte Independent*, April 24, 1917.

thus both oceans.<sup>44</sup> Wilson himself was the target of many comparable accusations during the period.

### **Wilson Un-American**

Irish-American newspapers and organizations leveled similar charges against Woodrow Wilson during the First World War as they had done against Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. Wilson himself had touted his “100 percent Americanism” leading up to his re-election in 1916 and labeled as “disloyal Americans” anyone who accused him of having pro-British tendencies. The Irish rejected this and attacked Wilson’s American credentials, claiming they paled in comparison to the Americanism of the Irish. By the era of the First World War, the American Irish increasingly tended to frame the issue of American freedom as the opposite of all things British. The *Irish World* called upon Irish-American Democrats to choose “between Jeffersonian principles of Americanism and Wilsonian pro-Britishism.”<sup>45</sup>

The Irish unflatteringly compared Wilson to the greatest American presidents as a way of demonstrating his shortcomings. In the “Against the League of Nations” pamphlet, the author questioned why President Wilson had not stated his “case to the American people, as Lincoln would have done, and let the people decide?” When discussing Wilson’s failure to follow through with his earlier stated war aims, the pamphlet asked what Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln would say if “asked to subordinate to expediency those principles of human liberty for which Washington suffered at Valley Forge, which Jefferson wrote into the Declaration of Independence and

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<sup>44</sup> FOIF National Council Resolution, March 29, 1923, Folder 9, Box 8, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Leader*, September 29, 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 12; *Irish World*, July 26, 1919.

which Lincoln extended to the black man? Their answer would be that which is in the heart of the American people today.”<sup>46</sup>

Irish-American opponents of Wilson labeled him as an elitist, compared to the populist Abraham Lincoln. In reference to Wilson’s unseemly remarks about those who opposed his League of Nations, which included calling them “dreamers of a forgotten age,” the *Irish World* alleged that “Such are the contemptuous epithets Woodrow Wilson flings at Lincoln’s “plain people” because they do not share his view that the supreme duty of America is to pledge herself to the defense of European robber nations that have built up their power on the ruins of weaker nations.”<sup>47</sup>

The *Gaelic American* blasted the “British propaganda” that stated that “every true American must stand behind the President” as “un-American and untrue.” According to the paper, “It would substitute for the old American spirit of independence the English slavish habit of subservience to the King.” The *Gaelic American* called Senator Charles Thomas of Colorado a “poor American” for taking Wilson’s side against Jeremiah O’Leary in arguing that criticizing the government and Wilson should qualify as treason. Thomas wanted O’Leary prosecuted as a traitor, and the *Gaelic American* charged him with advocating doctrines that “are subversive of free government and un-American.” According to the paper, Thomas wanted to grant Wilson power to rule by decree which not even Russian czars, English Kings, or German Emperors had. After O’Leary sent Wilson a letter discussing the defeat of pro-Ally politicians in state elections and detailing his plan to defeat Wilson in 1916, Wilson angrily responded that “I would feel

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<sup>46</sup> “Against the League of Nations,” National Secretary (printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS. This pamphlet apparently ignored Wilson’s ill-fated whistle-stop train tour promoting membership in his League of Nations.

<sup>47</sup> *Irish World*, October 4, 1919.

deeply mortified to have you or anybody like you vote for me. Since you have access to many disloyal Americans and I have not, I will ask you to convey this message to them.”

The *Gaelic American* considered this incident evidence of Wilson’s “hatred for the Irish.”<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the 1916 election campaign, the Irish-American press attacked Wilson’s Americanism, as they were convinced by that time that he sought to enter the war on Britain’s side. It mocked his re-election slogan by pointing out that Wilson had only “kept us out of war with England.” The *Leader* called Wilson “a menace” whose neutrality proclamations were “never sincere.” By early 1916, the paper was calling on the Democrats to nominate “anyone but Wilson.” Wilson subordinated the real interests of America because of his “kowtowing to England,” which evoked “the old American hatred of our ancient oppressor.” The *Leader* cynically referred to Wilson as our “American” president. The Irish were opposed to Wilson because “he has made America a byword [sic] for sham neutrality and slavish subservience to England before the peoples of the world.” “We want a man big enough for America,” said the *Leader*, “not a nincompoop who regards her as the happy hunting ground of those who share his bias against the motherland of our best citizens.” England was, in their opinion, rooting for the “anti-Irish and anti-American” Wilson to win the election.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Gaelic American*, February 17, 1917; November 20, 1915; quoted in S.D. Lovell, *The Presidential Election of 1916* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 109, 110. The Irish also feared that a re-elected (and emboldened) Wilson administration would crack down on their organizations – see Beth McKillen, “The Corporatist Model, World War I, and the Public Debate over the League of Nations” in *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 2(April 1991): 178.

<sup>49</sup> *Leader*, September 23, 1916; September 18, 1915; February 26, 1916; October 7, 1916; October 21, 1916; November 4, 1916. Wilson had enjoyed a general level of support from Irish Americans prior to 1916, but several issues in that year had complicated matters for him. Wilson’s refusal to act on behalf of condemned Irish revolutionary Sir Roger Casement further eroded support – Lovell, *Presidential Election*, 110.

In an article on the 1916 Democratic Convention, the *Gaelic American* called the gathering in St. Louis “the most shameful exhibition in American history of slavish subserviency [sic] to a man of discredited moral character, without political convictions, who has prostituted his office to the service of England.” Though they were “Grateful for England’s aid to the South” during the Civil War, Wilson’s “appeal to the Know-Nothing spirit” disgusted the Irish. Wilson’s attacks on hyphenated Americans angered Irish publications like the *Gaelic American*, which claimed that through his “moral cowardice,” Wilson attacked the foreign-born who had seen through his “thinly disguised partisanship with England.” Seeking to enter the World War, Wilson, using the “words of an Autocrat,” planned on casting aside Washington’s advice on avoiding entangling alliances and assisting European imperialism while neglecting the aspirations of small nations like Ireland.<sup>50</sup>

As the *Leader* declared during the 1916 campaign, “we want a President who is an American, not a degenerate mental hyphenate who splashes his own filth across the faces of the American people.” The paper went on to say that “as American citizens we want a man who will uphold the honor of the American flag as fully as President Wilson has allowed it to be spat upon, and as completely as Wilson has upheld the failing prestige of the enemies of our country.” The *Leader* also accused Wilson of doing nothing to stop the executions of the Irish nationalists accused of involvement in the Easter Rising and for being the most anti-Irish president in American history. “Anti-Irish and anti-American, the votes he will get from any one who has a drop of Irish blood in

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<sup>50</sup> *Gaelic American*, June 24, 1916; July 22, 1916; March 10, 1917.

his veins will be easily counted,” asserted the *Leader* in an article arguing that England wanted Wilson to win the election.<sup>51</sup>

The Easter Rising, organized by the physical-force nationalist Irish Republican Brotherhood, was the most significant Irish rebellion since the failed 1798 uprising. Centered in Dublin, the insurrection saw Irish republicans seize several key outposts in Dublin and proclaim an independent Irish republic. The barbarous and callous repression that followed, including the executions of several leaders (and some family members) of the Easter Rising, served to radicalize Irish nationalists and popularize the proposition of physical force as a means to an end. The mythical organic distinctiveness of the Irish nation (as opposed to the Anglo-Protestant other) and collective Irish memories of both real and perceived historical injustices (suffered at the hand of that Anglo-Protestant other) had long existed in Ireland. The draconian implementation of martial law and cruel repression handed out by the British served as a cultural trigger point, however, whereby these national myths and memories combined to forge a new Irish sensibility sympathetic to physical force.<sup>52</sup>

FOIF also played a role in this, working secretly with the German government to arrange for weapons to be delivered for the uprising. The British had been intercepting the codes for months when the Secret Service presented a subpoena to the *Gaelic*

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<sup>51</sup> *Leader*, November 4, 1916. This brutal repression completely eliminated any support for Redmond amongst Irish Americans, which was demonstrated by even Shane Leslie of the moderate Home Rule paper *Ireland* pulling his support. As Leslie stated, the Irish “remembered Robert Emmet and knew where they stood” after these executions – see Carroll, *American Opinion*, 65, 69. For a further discussion of how the American Catholic press reacted, see Thomas J. Rowland, “The American Catholic Press and the Easter Rebellion,” *Catholic Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (January 1995): 67-83. For a collection of essays commemorating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Easter Rising, see Gebriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh, editors, *1916: The Long Revolution* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2006). For an older narrative history of the events of Easter Week 1916, see Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963).

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Githens-Mazer, *Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 211-213.

*American* on April 6, 1916. Devoy rightly accused President Wilson of tipping the British off to the plot, although they had not needed his help. The fierce British repression angered the American public. Speeches and writings by radical Irish Americans like Devoy and moderates like William Bourke Cockran helped harness this American sensibility, which probably saved Eamon de Valera's life.<sup>53</sup>

The *Gaelic American* attacked Wilson's Americanism by emphasizing his disloyal roots and rapprochement with England. The paper enthusiastically pointed out Wilson's rebellious roots, blasting "his attacks on 'Hyphenated Americans' – meaning Irish and German citizens whose relatives were fighting for the Union when his family connections and most of those in his Cabinet were trying to destroy it."<sup>54</sup> The Irish had helped preserve the Union while Wilson's family had sought to tear it apart.

Neither candidate was sufficiently American to Irish-American nationalists. Since Republican Charles Evans Hughes was "more British than the British," and Wilson seemed hell bent on entering the war on England's side, the *World* suggested that liberty-loving Americans needed to "concentrate their efforts on electing truly American representatives." Hughes actually tried to capitalize on immigrant frustrations with Wilson, and he met in 1916 with the American Independence Conference, led by renowned Irish-American nationalist and head of the American Truth Society Jeremiah O'Leary. Hughes tried to reassure the congregation of Irish and German Americans of his superior brand of Americanism, but it was only enough to convince those who already despised Wilson.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 215-224, 232-237.

<sup>54</sup> *Gaelic American*, October 21, 1916.

<sup>55</sup> *Irish World*, September 23, 1916; John Patrick Buckley, *The New York Irish: Their View of American Foreign Policy, 1914-1921* (New York City: Arno Press, 1976), 94-95. O'Leary had never set foot in

Some Irish-American periodicals half-heartedly endorsed Charles Evans Hughes. The *Gaelic American* published only one pro-Hughes editorial, and the *Irish World* endorsed the Republican only at the last minute. The radical Irish press emphasized the fact that the Republicans had won six of the eight states with the highest proportions of Irish-American residents, but a closer examination of the results clearly indicates that the Irish did not abandon Wilson in 1916. He received a better percentage of votes in Irish districts than had previous Democrats. Those returns indicate the gulf between Irish-American leaders and common folks, who cared much more about American than Irish issues. The *Irish World* questioned the legitimacy of Wilson's victory by emphasizing his electoral reliance on "the old area of slavery."<sup>56</sup>

Cohalan and the FOIF opposed Wilson in 1916, using his attacks on "hyphenism" as a key rallying cry for Irish-Americans who had to burnish their American credentials. These Irish who supported Germany were branded as un-American, though they tried to qualify their opposition as strictly opposition to European entanglements in general and Britain specifically. While FOIF claimed victory, with six of the eight states with the

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Ireland, but he founded the American Truth Society and ran its official mouthpiece, *The Bull*. He emphasized that he supported Irish independence as an American – "The American of Irish blood or of any other racial extraction who wishes for Ireland a lesser measure of liberty than that which America enjoys is not in harmony with the spirit of real Americanism," he wrote. O'Leary's father-in-law and cousin had served in the 69<sup>th</sup> New York during the Civil War, and he also enlisted in 1905, eventually earning a promotion to adjutant - see Stephen L. Harris, *Duffy's War: Father Francis Duffy, Wild Bill Donovan, and the Irish Fighting 69<sup>th</sup> in World War I* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2006), 24. O'Leary attacked the Americanism of those opposed to an independent Ireland, arguing that "An enemy with its guns trained upon our country is a tonic to its patriotism but a foraging lion in the garb of an angel of peace with an olive branch in one paw and chloroform in the other is an object of circumspection to every American citizen who believes that 'all men are created free and equal,' and as his ancestors believed in 1776, 1812 and 1865, that such principles are still, as then, worth fighting for and dying for" – see Jeremiah O'Leary, *My Political Trial and Experiences* (New York: Jefferson Publishing Co., Inc., 1919), 55.

<sup>56</sup> William M. Leary, Jr. "Woodrow Wilson, Irish-Americans, and the Election of 1916" *Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (June 1967): 64-72; *Irish World*, November 18, 1916. According to John B. Duff, Cohalan and Devoy certainly did not speak for the Irish-American majority, so the extent to which common Irish Americans opposed Wilson has been overblown. Wilson actually did well with the Irish in 1916, and Devoy supported the Democrats openly in the 1918 elections – see John B. Duff, "The Versailles Treaty and the Irish-Americans," in *Journal of American History* 55, no. 3 (December 1968): 583-585.

highest proportion of Irish citizens going for Hughes, a greater percentage of the Irish actually supported Wilson in 1916 than in 1912.<sup>57</sup>

An Irish campaign against Wilson during the 1916 election season called him the “best president England ever had,” and after his narrow victory, many Irish papers reasoned that the Republican victories in the North and West were attributable to Irish and German voting blocs. Nevertheless, vehement Republican opposition to the German cause, combined with Wilson’s labor-friendly progressivism is why most American Irish stood by Wilson in 1916. These victories by Wilson suggest the width of the gulf between the Irish and some of their radical leaders.<sup>58</sup>

The Irish leaders who opposed Wilson’s re-election bid before the U.S. entered the Great War were even more vehement in their attacks upon his Americanism after the First World War had ended (and Wilson had proposed the League of Nations). And again, they went after his Americanism. John Devoy proposed a resolution in February 1920 attacking the Americanism of President Wilson. His League of Nations “is contrary to the spirit of American liberty” and “a violation of the solemn declarations of President Wilson as to America’s objects in the war and injurious to the interest of the American people.” While the *Gaelic American* pledged its loyalty to the American war effort, it still openly objected to Wilson’s activities at home. In regard to Wilson and his supporters, the *Gaelic American* claimed that “their aim is to turn this Republic into an Autocracy with more power than that possessed by any of the rulers of the Old World and

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism: the Friends of Irish Freedom, 1916-1935* (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press 2005), 48-57. Wilson narrowly emerged victorious, claiming only a forty thousand-vote majority in New York City. He owed the Irish nothing, and he gave them nothing – see O’Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans*, 124.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Cuddy, “Irish-American Propagandists and American Neutrality, 1914-1917” in *Mid-America* 49, no. 4(1967): 269, 273. The Irish were not isolationists. Rather they were internationalists with a vastly different take on how the United States should exercise its international influence – see Joseph Edward Cuddy, *Irish-Americans and National Isolationism, 1914-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 1-2.

less responsibility to the people. Under such a regime the liberties of the American people would disappear and the Declaration of Independence would be a mockery and a sham.”<sup>59</sup>

The espionage laws in the United States often brought these Irish-American periodicals under scrutiny. The *Irish World*, *Gaelic American*, and *Freeman's Journal* all were barred from the mail at some point. Few actual issues were banned; the *Irish World*, for example, only had five issues taken out of the mail. Nevertheless, a concerted campaign of harassment of Irish periodicals took place throughout the war, with the goal being to silence the *Irish World* and other “miserable little hounds” that proposed what the U.S. government deemed to be anti-American opinions. The Espionage Act was the first official policy against disloyalty in the American press, and Irish aims were viewed as sympathetic to the German cause and thus branded as disloyal and anti-American. When Irish nationalists like Dr. Patrick McCartan and Liam Mellows were arrested in alleged German conspiracies, the American government took the opportunity to link Irish nationalism with supporters of Germany. The *Freeman's Journal* was supposedly barred from the federal mail because it had printed a statement by Thomas Jefferson in which he affirmed his preference for a free Ireland. The *Irish Press* was barred after only eight issues and was largely distributed manually for a while in New York. The *Irish World* was suspended for hoping that Palestine never became a Jewish Kingdom, and the *Gaelic American* was barred for criticizing Frederick E. Smith, Roger Casement's prosecutor.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> FOIF National Council Minutes, February 13, 1920, Folder 6, Box 8, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Gaelic American*, June 2, 1917.

<sup>60</sup> In the case of Mellows, this also had to do with his socialism. Mick Mulcrone, “Those ‘miserable little hounds’: World War I Postal Censorship of the *Irish World*” in *Journalism History* 20, no. 1(Spring 1994): 15-18; Gilbert C. Fite and H.C. Petersen, *Opponents of War, 1917-1918* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 100; Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism*, 74(n); James R. Mock, *Censorship, 1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 145. For analysis of postal censorship

Xenophobia played a role in this suppression as well, although many ethnic editors came out in support of the Espionage Act so as to appear loyal. A July 12, 1918 CPI flyer explained the reasoning behind barring the *Gaelic American* from the U.S. mail:

This paper, “devoted to the cause of Irish independence,” is the organ of the Irish irreconcilable party in America, whose chief aim seems to be to keep alive the spirit of hatred towards England. It is on the confidential list of unmailable [sic] American publications compiled on May 10<sup>th</sup>. The present issue is little else than a tissue of falsehoods in respect of recent developments in the Irish situation. An article in issue of June 15<sup>th</sup> attempts to show that the Sinn Fein leaders were arrested on false charges. The United States Postal Department is violently attacked in article under the following heading: The Post Office Department Bars from the Mails Papers containing refutations of the falsehoods, and deprives the Fathers, Brothers, and other near relatives of gallant American Soldiers and Sailors of their only possible defence [sic].....A Foul Conspiracy against Irish Liberty.

When the *Gaelic American* (along with the *Irish World* and the *New York Freeman’s Journal*) was barred from the Federal mails in January 1918, Devoy’s paper reasoned that it must have been for its disparagement of the British, “not for any criticism of the Government of the United States or any of its policies. The *Gaelic American* has never had a line of such criticism since America entered the war.” When barred again in May 1918, the *Gaelic American* believed that it was for personal reasons on behalf of Postmaster General Burleson, who was mad at the paper for its “protesting against his gross abuse of the powers given him by the Espionage Law, not for American, but for English reasons.” Censorship also drew the ire of the *Irish World*, which argued that the

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and the relationship between Wilson and Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burleson in 1917-1918 (that focuses more on socialist publications), see Donald Johnson, “Wilson, Burleson, and Censorship in the First World War” in *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 1 (February 1962): 46-58. McCartan and Mellows were revolutionists in Ireland but had close ties to the United States. Each worked for the *Gaelic American* at one point despite eventually breaking with Devoy. – see C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

infringements on Socialists and those speaking out against Wilson's League of Nations were the result of the work of "un-American jackasses."<sup>61</sup>

This was not restricted to censorship either. Any organization sympathetic to the German cause was subject to harassment and government infiltration. FOIF and the Clan na Gael were primary targets, accused of participating in anti-American activities. British and American officials penetrated all of these organizations, and the Wilson administration compiled its list of subversives "in the name of national defense" in the fall of 1917. He included Daniel Cohalan, Jeremiah O'Leary and Joseph McGarrity of the Clan na Gael (and *Irish Press*) for their role in the April 1916 Von Igel affair, an Irish-German gun-running plot meant to supply the Easter rebels with weapons. Therein, anti-American activities were also retroactive, as that had occurred well before American entry into the war. While Cohalan and McGarrity escaped arrest, seventy-seven Irish Americans known to Cohalan and Kansas labor lawyer Frank P. Walsh were arrested under the auspices of the Espionage Act for such offenses as inciting strikes in mining and lumbering regions and distributing anti-war leaflets. As Mary McWhorter, President of the Ladies Auxiliary of the AOH said, "we were deprived of every bit of our personal

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<sup>61</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 24-25; *Gaelic American*, February 2, 1918; May 11, 1918; *Irish World*, Dec. 6, 1919; Box 3, Record Group 63, Committee on Public Information, Entry #117, United States National Archives. The Committee for Public Information worked in concert with Postmaster General Burleson to enforce these restrictions. Although there was never an Irish-American division, Creel still monitored subversive elements. He believed that the vast majority of the Irish were well-behaved and that the actions of a few prominent disloyal ones should not detract from the "shining patriotism of the millions of Americans that we refer to as 'adopted'" – see Bernadette Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: From Empire to Independence, 1913-1929* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 150, 158. Ironically, Creel's book on the Irish fight for freedom echoes many of the sentiments found within circles he would have considered "disloyal."

liberty ‘as a war necessity.’” The *Irish World* decried this “brutal and un-American reign of terror...now in full swing from the Atlantic to the Pacific.”<sup>62</sup>

The U.S. Secret Service agents raided the German consul’s (Wolf Von Igel) office in New York City after a prolonged and complicated set of negotiations between Dublin and Berlin (channeled through Devoy the intermediary). The notion that Germany would supply the Irish with troops and submarines even came up, though these ideas were scuttled by April 1916. The *Aud* was detained off the coast of Ireland, and the British Navy seized all military equipment. Devoy unequivocally (and thus, unfairly) blamed Wilson. In fact, Britain had no need for Wilson to tip them off, as they already knew of this planned attack. Cohalan and Devoy had theorized to the Germans that an Irish revolt coinciding with a fresh German offensive in France was the way to defeat the British. Wilson did succeed in publicizing the event and thus labeling this Irish faction as anti-American saboteurs. He would use this charge of pro-Germanism to force Devoy and others to scale back their overt anti-war attacks.<sup>63</sup>

Wilson’s decision to abandon Ireland in 1919 to maintain British support for his League of Nations crystallized an Irish-American sensibility. Even Wilson’s harshest critics throughout the war expressed faith in him when he left for Europe in early 1919. Unfortunately, this tepid faith did not last long. Much to their chagrin, Wilson decided to classify Ireland as a domestic British issue, thus losing champions of Irish freedom

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<sup>62</sup> Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland*, 146-148; *Irish World* quoted in Buckley, *New York Irish*, 152-153.

<sup>63</sup> Buckley, *New York Irish*, 72-77; Thomas J. Noer, “The American Government and the Irish Question during World War I” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 72, no. 1(1973): 100-101. Devoy also negotiated with Indian nationalists in an attempt to combine efforts and undermine the British in that way. A plot to ship weapons to India with the intention of reducing the British war capacity involved German, Irish, and Hindu nationalist movements – see Matthew Erin Plowman, “Irish Republicans and the Indo-German Conspiracy of World War I,” *New Hibernia Review* 7, no. 3(2003): 80-105. For his part, O’Leary suffered a lengthy jail sentence for violating the Espionage Act – see O’Leary, *My Political Trial and Experiences*, 149.

forever. Unsurprisingly, they proclaimed that their reason for opposing the League of Nations was because it was “un-American.”

### **Irish-American Pragmatism**

To understand how the Irish coalesced in opposition to Wilson’s League of Nations, it is necessary to analyze how Irish opinion evolved during the war itself. Much of the nationalistic Irish press took the side of the Central Powers when the lights first went out in Europe. While the Central Powers had no particular interest in freeing Ireland, they could potentially benefit from Britain being distracted or having to divert its war resources. Irish leaders thus pragmatically tried to support the side in the war which could best assist Ireland. Consequently, they supported the Central Powers, at least until official American entry into the war forced their hand. At that point, they used their own Americanism when opposing America. Irish nationalist publications tended to support Germany at first but begrudgingly supported America and intended to do everything they could to hold Wilson to his promises regarding national self-determination for smaller countries like Ireland. The *Gaelic American*, *Irish World*, *Irish Press*, *Butte Independent*, *San Francisco Leader*, and *Irish Standard* (Minneapolis) all supported either Germany or American neutrality when the war first broke out. Each paper came to support Wilson during the winter of 1918-1919. After Wilson abandoned his stated war aims so as to keep Britain on board with his League of Nations, these Irish nationalists immediately withdrew their support.

Not wanting to appear traitorous, the Irish-American press tentatively supported Wilson’s war effort. Yet after the war, Wilson’s vision of America’s role in the world,

especially as it pertained to Ireland, sharply diverged from that of the American Irish. Again, these American Irish would design the debate as one of Americanism vs. Wilsonianism. After the 1916 election, Irish-Americans accepted (sometimes quite reluctantly) American entry into the First World War and tried to make the best of the situation. Since America would seemingly have the most powerful voice at the peace conference, the American Irish focused their energy on Americanizing the Irish issue. At first the Irish community was hopeful because of President Wilson's stated intentions regarding national self-determination, but this turned once he decided to qualify Ireland as a domestic issue for the British government, thus committing future American military support to keep Ireland under British control. The Irish press universally condemned the League of Nations, cloaking their criticism in purely American language. "What think you must be the thoughts of American parents of Celtic blood, whose sons' bodies lie in Flanders Field," asked the Irish National Bureau's official organ, "whilst the Empire with whose soldiers their sons fought side by side continues to deny their kindred across the sea the same measure of independence America and her allies bestowed upon the races who were our enemies in this war?"<sup>64</sup>

After the war, the American Irish initially supported Wilson. Their sentiment, however, changed when he refused to meet with the American Commission on Irish Independence while in Paris. Wilson preached democracy but made it secondary to the League of Nations. This alarmed the Irish, as they felt that the grass-roots influence on American foreign policy would be eradicated (along with prospects for Irish freedom) should the nation enter the League of Nations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, October 17, 1919.

<sup>65</sup> McKillen, "The Corporatist Model," 191-192.

As early as August 1914, the *Gaelic American* aligned itself with the Central Powers against Britain, calling Austria-Hungary “Ireland’s Ally” and arguing that the “sympathy of the American nation then will lie with German culture and civilization, which is fighting against a half Asiatic and slightly cultured barbarism.” Editor John Devoy did not believe that he could convince President Wilson to join the Central Powers, but he hoped to counterbalance the influence of the pro-British press in America. Perhaps he could convince the president to stay out of the war altogether if he saw a united German-Irish front opposed to it. The fiercely nationalistic *Butte Independent* announced early on that it was supporting Germany in its war effort against England and while it sympathized with the Belgian people, it recognized that Germany had to reach the sea somehow and the obvious path was through Belgium. Along those same lines, the *Irish World* reasoned that the Irish still had to side with the Germans since they were “the enemy of Ireland’s enemy.”<sup>66</sup>

These Irish-American nationalists advocated strict neutrality and openly flouted pro-German sentiments before April 1917. They had been concerned about an Anglo-American détente since the Venezuelan boundary dispute in the mid-1890s, and American sympathies for the British during the First World War further aroused these passions and concerns. The Irish-American press claimed that the Germans were fighting for Irish freedom, lobbied for a strict embargo on Britain, pleaded with constituents to vote Republican in 1916, and scoffed at the strict terms of the *Sussex* pledge. While these rabble-rousers failed to gain much in the way of concrete gains, they did contribute to a divided nation that kept the country neutral for two and a half years. The nationalistic

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<sup>66</sup> *Gaelic American*, August 1, 1914; August 22, 1914; Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 199; *Butte Independent*, August 8, 1914; *Irish World*, September 23, 1916.

Irish-American press took a pragmatic approach to Irish issues. They wanted an Irish republic modeled on the American republic, and they viewed the distraction of the First World War as the perfect opportunity for the Irish to break the chains that bound them to England. They hated the moderate Home Rule movement in Ireland under John Redmond; nothing short of full independence would suffice.<sup>67</sup>

Redmond had little sympathy for the radical separatist faction of Irish nationalists, and this feeling was mutual. Many denounced him for his inability to curb the flow of Irish emigration or to unite Irish from across the political spectrum, feats they were unable to achieve themselves after Redmond's death. Redmond particularly aroused the ire of Irish-American nationalists with his support of the British war effort during the Great War. Redmond encouraged Irishmen to enlist in the British Army to fight against German militarism and in defense of the national integrity of small countries like Belgium. By doing so, Redmond believed that the Irish would prove their capacity for the self-government so close at hand in 1914. Sinn Feiners cautioned against Irish participation, pointing out that Britain and not Germany was the imperial overlord of Ireland and that the Great War constituted an imperial power struggle instead of a fight against German militarism. They asked the Irish to stay home and prepare to fight for their independence. While most Irishmen stayed loyal to Redmond during the first year of the war, they soured after the significant casualties suffered on the Western front and during the Gallipoli Campaign.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cuddy, "Irish-American Propagandists," 252-275. See also Dean R. Esslinger, "American German and Irish Attitudes toward Neutrality, 1914-1917: A Study of Catholic Minorities" in *Catholic Historical Review* 53, no. 2(1967): 194-216.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Bew, *John Redmond* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1996), 3; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Question: Two centuries of Conflict* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 133.

This cost him a great deal of support in the United States, as Irish Americans quickly pulled support from Redmond after hearing him call for Irish Volunteers to fight with the British. John Redmond was a constitutional nationalist and member of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who travelled abroad to the United States and Australia in search of funds for the party. According to a recent biographer, Redmond reconciled his desire for Irish freedom with the political realities of the era and his consistent support of federalism. And his constitutional nationalism clearly improved the lives of the Irish people, of both the present and the future. Not only did this moderate road lead to concrete improvements such as land reform and improvements in laborer housing, but Redmond and his associates “left a rich legacy which would underpin the stability of the future independent Ireland as one of the few uninterruptedly democratic states in Europe in the twentieth century.”<sup>69</sup>

The Irish-American nationalistic press supported the enemy of their enemy, which happened to be the Central Powers, until the United States entered the war. Their measured initial support for the Allies gave way to cautious optimism once American victory seemingly gave President Wilson a mandate to pursue at Versailles his pre-war aims regarding national self-determination for small nations like Ireland. Once he subverted the Irish issue to keep his precious League of Nations, the Irish nationalists excoriated him as a traitorous and un-American British stooge. They used the legacy of American isolationism to make their point.

The Irish emphasized that they were carrying forth the Washingtonian mantle of isolationism by opposing American entry into the Great War. The *Irish World*

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<sup>69</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion*, 47-48; Dermot Meleady, *Redmond: The Parnellite* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 5.

consistently referenced Washington's Farewell Address as the main pillar of American foreign policy and opposed American entry into the Great War based on these principles. As a result, the paper vehemently opposed Wilsonian idealism and America inching toward war in Europe. "Never was there a time when there was so urgent need for the country to give heed to Washington's solemn warning against foreign entangling alliance," said the *Irish World*, for America could do her own fighting for her own needs. "We have no concern with those quarrels," it said of the Great War in Europe, "To America and America alone is our allegiance due." Even after America's entry into the fray, the *Irish World* continued to call for isolationism, arguing that America was turning into a "military bureaucracy" and needed to return to the principles of the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>70</sup>

The more moderate, Catholic press took a more tempered approach. They supported the Irish Home Rule movement instead of the radical Sinn Fein movement in Ireland. As opposed to pragmatically supporting Irish freedom, moderate groups identified with Wilsonian notions of freedom and democracy. They supported Wilson the idealist and wanted the United States to continue to serve as the beacon of hope for all the oppressed around the world, including Ireland. There were two poles of Irish-American nationalism during the First World War era. The first was the moderate Home Rule movement, which was willing to accept a modicum of autonomy for Ireland, while the more radical group were separatists who claimed that only full and complete independence would suffice. Many moderates actually complained that the nationalistic faction was simply louder and better organized than were other groups. For example, moderate Irish-American lawyer John Quinn of New York called the Irish Race

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<sup>70</sup> *Irish World*, February 3, 1917; April 14, 1917; April 21, 1917.

Conventions “a bunch of Clan extremists.” Moderates like Shane Leslie, who published *Ireland*, held that the nationalistic press did not represent true Irish-American sensibilities. He pointed out that Irish opinions varied a great deal and that the press had drastically distorted these views. The Irish-German press, as he dismissively referred to it, was more an attempt to “influence rather than to express Irish feeling,” and must be discarded as any kind of an indicator as to the feelings of the Irish in general. He was referring particularly to Cohalan and Devoy in issuing these statements.<sup>71</sup>

Sinn Fein was an Irish nationalist movement founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith, in response to the frustration with the slow progress of the Irish Parliamentary Party and in part because of his belief that the militaristic alternative was not feasible. While not opposed to the use of military force, Griffith recognized that little prospect for success existed. He initially even offered to accept a dual monarchy (i.e. on the Austria-Hungarian model), with a separate Irish republican government. When the 1914 Home Rule Bill was suspended during the Great War, Irish separatists gained the upper hand in public opinion. The Easter Rising and British reaction radicalized the Sinn Fein movement after 1916. By the aftermath of the First World War, much of Sinn Fein supported a united 32-county Irish Republic, though it would split over accepting the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 (which divided Ireland).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, 3; Buckley, *New York Irish*, 54; Shane Leslie, *The Irish Issue in its American Aspect: A Contribution to the Settlement of Anglo-American Relations during and after the Great War* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1919), 180-183.

<sup>72</sup> Kevin Rafter, *Sinn Fein, 1905-2005* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 38, 43, 47, 57. The radical and militarized unionist faction and radical separatist Irish Republican Brotherhood (the heirs to the Fenians of the 1860s) made the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party untenable for many, and the void was filled by Sinn Fein. Michael Laffan argued that the Sinn Fein movement democratized the Irish nationalist movement after the Easter Rising of 1916, with its post-1923 adherents and successors dominating Irish politics – see Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Fein Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11-16. For a discussion of non-violent Sinn Fein protests to British authority (chiefly the establishment of an autonomous rival legal system) between 1916 and 1923, see

The nationalistic press and the Catholic press had much in common with one another. They both embraced the pervasive set of principles inherent in Irish notions of American universalism, and both groups sought to free Ireland through an American brand of internationalism. The moderate group supported Wilsonian idealism as the way to achieve this, while the nationalistic group wanted concrete action taken to free Ireland. The Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago provides a good example of a moderate Irish-American organization, which supported the Home Rule movement championed by John Redmond as opposed to the revolutionary Sinn Fein movement championed by organizations such as FOIF and the nationalistic press. Nevertheless, the club favored American recognition of the Irish Republic and even gave President Wilson seven reasons why he should do so. These included Ireland being an older nation than Poland or Czechoslovakia and touting Irish service in George Washington's Continental Army.<sup>73</sup>

The Irish Fellowship Club took a more idealistic approach, arguing that the Irish should fight for Irish freedom by supporting Wilson and the Allied war efforts. In a March 1918 address to the IFC, T.P. O'Connor called Alsace and Lorraine a "new Ireland" established by Germany back in 1871; O'Connor wondered how any true proponent of Irish liberty could put their faith in Germany winning and then granting "to Ireland what she has refused all of her own people." Declining to "isolate Ireland from the fight for human liberty" around the world, O'Connor also would "decline to detach the case of Ireland from the interest of the Allies." Claiming that his opponents were

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David Foxtob, *Revolutionary Lawyers: Sinn Fein and the Crown Courts in Ireland and Britain, 1916-1923* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008). Shane Leslie was charged with disseminating Irish Parliamentary propaganda in the United States. The *Citizen* reported in June 1918 that he had actually said that "if Home Rule in Ireland would prevent America in any way from victory then let Home Rule perish." The *Citizen* agreed at this time; obviously, radicals like Devoy and Cohalan would not have – see *Citizen*, June 21, 1918.

<sup>73</sup> "General Material," Folder 2, Box 1, Roger Faherty Papers (Irish Fellowship Club Papers, hereafter IFC Papers), Chicago Historical Society.

guilty of supporting a “pro-German and anti-American policy,” O’Connor insisted that supporting Germany betrayed American principles and thus doomed any prospect of Irish freedom. An October 29, 1917 response to T.P. O’Connor’s appeal discussed the foolishness inherent in attempting to distinguish between the Allied nations. “There is not a single honest and genuine Irish American who does not stand by the President and the American government,” said the note, and “not any power on earth could turn one honest and genuine Irish American into a traitor to the American flag.”<sup>74</sup>

The Home Rule movement encapsulated all Irish self-government movements, although “Home Rulers” were generally considered moderates open to a more limited form of Irish independence. The movement sought to repeal the 1801 Act of Union that absorbed the Irish Parliament under the British umbrella, establishing the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Home Rule attempted to harness and focus nationalist militants as well as more moderate elements in fighting for a level of Irish autonomy. Home Rulers aspired to a level of autonomy where Ireland would govern most of her own local affairs, while still recognizing the overarching authority of the British Parliament. While Irish Home Rulers started the movement, they recognized the limitations they faced in light of British hegemony. Ironically, Home Rulers argued that this level of self-government would allow for the Irish people to reconcile their ethnic and religious divisions, but the 1921 settlement ended up dividing Ireland in two. The

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<sup>74</sup> Reports, Folder 1 of 4, IFC Papers, Chicago Historical Society. Judge Edward F. Dunne and others founded the Irish Fellowship Club “for the purpose of promoting friendship and good fellowship among Americans of Irish birth and descent; to give recognition to and keep alive Irish cultural traditions; and to...celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day” – see Eileen Durkin, “Saint Patrick’s Day at Saint Patrick’s Church,” in *At the Crossroads: Old Saint Patrick’s and the Chicago Irish*, ed. Ellen Skerrett (Chicago: Wild Onion Books, 1997), 13.

IFC supported the parliamentary route to Irish Home Rule, but after the rise of Sinn Fein, they cabled President Wilson and Congress to ask them to recognize the Irish Republic.<sup>75</sup>

The Irish-American weekly the *Citizen* (Chicago) routinely printed announcements of the Irish Fellowship Club during the war. Throughout 1917 and 1918, like the IFC, the *Citizen* advocated unwavering loyalty to the American war effort and the American president. “We have called the efforts of the pacifists folly,” read the *Citizen* in September 1917, but “it is worse than folly. It is a crime. Every interest, even the interests of the enemy, demands that we should show ourselves to be, what we really are, in dead earnest and resolved to win.” Arguing that “we cannot get ourselves to think that disloyalty can achieve anything, except a prolongation of the war,” the *Citizen* adhered to the idea that only a total American victory could help Ireland. The paper thought that assisting Germany would not only defeat England but also “France, Belgium, even America, the traditional friends of Ireland.” As such, the efforts of the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party under T.P. O’Connor were preferable to the radical separatism of Sinn Fein.<sup>76</sup>

After the war began, William Dillon of the IFC wrote to William Bourke Cockran expressing his concerns regarding the radical Irish societies in the United States. These organizations denounced John Redmond and advocated subversive behavior in Ireland while Britain was distracted by the Great War. Radical Irish Americans had successfully convinced the people of Ireland that the majority of the American Irish supported the

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<sup>75</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (London: Weidengeld & Nicolson, 2003), 3; Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 173-174; Alan O’Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). For a more concise history of the Home Rule movement, see Grenfell Morton, *Home Rule and the Irish Question* (Essex: Longman House, 1980).

<sup>76</sup> *Citizen*, September 7, 1917; October 19, 1917. An example of an IFC pronouncement in the *Citizen*, calling for loyalty, can be found in the April 26, 1918 issue.

Germans. Dillon asked Cockran to write to Redmond and explain the fallacy of these assumptions, as Irish-American moderates refused to be lumped in with FOIF and other radical organizations. An unsigned letter to Redmond read “we express no opinion here as to the rights and wrongs of this war. We express no opinion as to what ought to be the sympathy of the Irish in this country.” Redmond complained that the vast majority of Irish-American newspapers distorted the facts from Europe with “the grossest misrepresentations with reference to the state of opinion in Ireland and with reference to all the events of the war.”<sup>77</sup>

The *Citizen* accused the Friends of Irish Freedom and other radical Irish-American organizations of misreporting true Irish sentiments. “Are the ‘Friends of Irish Freedom’ to be permitted to misrepresent the great bulk of the Irish citizens of the United States who now, as always, are the most loyal sons of the republic?” asked the paper. The author went on to accuse these more radical organizations of being dupes of the German ruling regime. The “race which bore the brunt of netting America free as well as of saving the Union itself,” could not “permit its fealty to the America to be doubted by remaining silent while these professional patriots play the Kaiser’s game,” warned the author. During the war, the *Citizen* consistently referred to FOIF and other Irish-American nationalists who had sympathies with the German cause facetiously as Irish

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<sup>77</sup> William Dillon to William Bourke Cockran, October 22, 1914, Folder 7, Box 13, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; Unknown author to John Redmond (it appears this letter is from Cockran), Folder 7, Box 13, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; John Redmond to Boyle, Folder 14, Box 13, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; Moderate Home Rulers who supported John Redmond had Shane Leslie publish the moderate paper *Ireland* beginning in 1916, but even Leslie was infuriated by the British needlessly creating martyrs in the Easter Rising, which doomed the movement – see Thomas R. Greene, “Shane Leslie and *Ireland*(1916-1917): England’s Little Irish Organ in New York,” *Eire-Ireland* 22, no. 4(1987): 72-92.

“patriots” (quotes used by them in sarcastic fashion) with “an un-Irish cause.” The *Citizen* maintained that the Chicago Irish were “Americans, first, last, and all the time.”<sup>78</sup>

The IFC and other moderate American Irish consistently adhered to Wilsonian idealism as the best way to achieve Ireland’s freedom and independence (at least during the war). On September 21, 1918, the Honorable Medill McCormick summed up the moderate Irish-American position by saying that “we in America can have no friends unless they are the friends of America. We must have no enemies but her enemies.” The Honorable Richard Hazelton, in an April 1918 speech on “The Conscription of Ireland,” said that “if Mr. Wilson is able to carry through those great ideals for which he stands, he will be greater than Lincoln, greater even than Washington, because, while Washington made America, and while Lincoln saved it, Woodrow Wilson will save the whole world!”<sup>79</sup>

The *Gaelic American* rejected this Wilsonian idealism and took pride in its radical reputation. It instructed its readers to be wary of any Anglo-American alliance that would trample Irish political and economic equality. The Irish instead needed to adopt American principles to achieve freedom and equality. The paper consistently demonstrated that the pro-British element in the press and within society as a whole was attempting to undermine these American principles. By opposing the British, they were actually champions of true American patriotism. “English rags” like the *New York Tribune* and *World* wanted the *Gaelic American* shut down, which was “a great compliment of which we are naturally proud.” The *Gaelic American* called the Wilsonian Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago the “Anti-Irish Fellowship Club.” T. P.

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<sup>78</sup> *Citizen*, September 14, 1917; September 28, 1917.

<sup>79</sup> Medill McCormick, speech to the IFC, September 21, 1918, IFC Reports, Folder 1 of 4; Richard Hazelton, “The Conscription of Ireland,” April 13, 1918, IFC Reports, Folder 1 of 4.

O'Connor and the "featherheads" in Chicago were "wholly out of touch with American ideals" for sticking to their moderate American idealism; the *Gaelic American* wanted overt action. The *Gaelic American* advocated direct American interference in Ireland during the war, while it had England "absolutely dependent on American help to win the war."<sup>80</sup>

Following the war, however, Irish-American newspapers of all political persuasions championed Wilson's pronouncements in favor of national self-determination. Even his most ardent opponents in the Irish-American press would support Wilson so long as he kept those promises. Support for Wilson's trip to Europe on behalf of American war ideals united all segments of the Irish-American press. As early as November 1916, the *Irish Standard* exclaimed that it supported President Wilson's plan to attend any peace conferences in Europe. The small nations of the world knew that Wilson was "a genuine friend and a powerful advocate" for the cause of American-style freedom. On the eve of the gathering at Versailles, the *Standard* lauded President Wilson and bragged that the British feared his idealism, as the League of Nations would clear the path for Irish independence. Even the *Gaelic American* experienced a fleeting change of heart in regard to Wilson in late 1918 as the war wound to a close. The Irish pressured Wilson from the beginning of American involvement in the war to be true to Ireland and grant them national self-determination. Wilson was such a convincing idealist that he even had John Devoy convinced by September 1918. The

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<sup>80</sup> Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism*, 26-28; *Gaelic American*, August 18, 1917; December 29, 1917; August 3, 1918. According to his biographer, Devoy rescued the Irish-American movement when he arrived in the United States in 1871, when he channeled Irish-American nationalism into the wider world of progressive reform and social agitation. When he founded the *Gaelic American* in 1903, he argued that the British were trying to Anglicize Americans – see Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 65, 103-104, 183-184.

*Gaelic American* applauded Wilson's decision to attend the peace conference, and it lauded his refusal to deem the British an "ally," instead preferring to label each side as a "co-belligerent."<sup>81</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, the *Independent* proclaimed faith in Wilson carrying out America's war aims. "President Wilson will insist when the hour of triumph arrives," the *Independent* predicted, "that the aims and objects and ideals of America on entering the war be fulfilled." After Wilson's reiterated declarations on the rights of small nations to self-determination, the paper asserted that "the American people, without distinction of party or racial origin will stand solidly and unitedly behind these declarations of the president." It appeared America would be the major power broker at the peace conference. Wilson worried about losing his precious League of Nations if he pressed the Irish issue; he was greatly annoyed by the insistence that he even broach the issue in Paris.<sup>82</sup>

After the Great War, the Irish constantly held Wilson to the literal meaning of his statements on freedom for small nations. The United Irish Societies of New York met on January 31, 1919 and passed a set of resolutions urging President Wilson "that the action of the people of Ireland fully meets all the requirements of his noble Declarations in favor of human liberty and the right of all people to Self-Government." After reluctantly

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<sup>81</sup> *Irish Standard*, November 23, 1916; January 18, 1919; *Gaelic American*, November 9, 1918; November 30, 1918.

<sup>82</sup> *Butte Independent*, November 16, 1918; *Gaelic American*, October 5, 1918; Joseph P. O'Grady, "The Irish," in *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*, ed. Joseph P. O'Grady (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 62-74. According to O'Grady, Wilson was the product of unreasonable 19<sup>th</sup>-century optimism who took little time in understanding the real issues. He spent more time working on his speeches than he did examining the actual issues at hand. As early as the summer of 1917, Wilson had shown his contempt for those pushing the Irish agenda. When FOIF nationally circulated a petition calling for Irish freedom that garnered several hundred thousand signatures, Wilson angrily sent the Secret Service to investigate the organization and its finances – see Charles Callan Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom, 1866-1922* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1957), 233-234.

supporting Wilson through America's participation in the Great War, the *Leader* supported Wilson on his trip to Versailles, hoping that he would assist Ireland in gaining her freedom. Eugene F. Kinkead tried to make Wilson look anti-American by using American Revolutionary symbolism against him. "On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1918, standing at the tomb of Washington, in that most hallowed spot in all the nation, President Wilson declared" national self-determination for all nations. Kinkead wondered "Did statesman ever utter a principle which so completely fits the case of Ireland in her relations with Great Britain?" As the *Citizen* (Chicago) stated, "Ireland must be included in the small nations here referred to. She has lacked the force to make good her claim to self-determination. Such things, says the President, must be rendered impossible in the future. Could more be asked from the illustrious occupant of the White House?"<sup>83</sup>

Wilson's initial comments (in support of national self-determination) upon arriving in Europe won him "the hearty approval and proud esteem of his countrymen." The *Irish World* praised Wilson's address "advocating a League of Nations" that would allow "unwilling subjects" to have their voices heard. It even called Wilson a "Sinn Feiner" in February 1919, pointing out that "not only he but every American who is loyal to the essential principles of the government to which he owes allegiance is a believer in the doctrine that constitutes the very essence of Sinn Feinism." As the war came to a close, the *Leader* supported President Wilson and his hard stand on Germany. Calling

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<sup>83</sup> *Gaelic American*, February 18, 1919; *Leader*, November 30, 1918; Eugene Kinkead speech, July 4, 1918, Folder 23, Box 7, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; *Citizen*, February 15, 1918. Born in Galway, Peter C. Yorke edited the *San Francisco Monitor* from 1894 until 1902, when he founded the *Leader* – see James P. Walsh and Timothy Foley, "Father Peter C. Yorke: Irish-American Leader," in *Hibernica* 14 (1974): 91. Yorke was an ardent Irish nationalist who spoke out against Irish political moderates like Redmond, Carson, and T.P. O'Connor. After refusing an invitation from Garret W. McEnerney to a banquet hosting O'Connor, Yorke wrote a fifty-page letter to McEnerney (published by FOIF) acrimoniously attacking the moderate Home Rule movement in Ireland. Yorke's newspapers always expressed nationalistic sympathies, justified by American principles – see Peter C. Yorke, *America and Ireland: An Open Letter to Mr. Garret W. McEnerney* (San Francisco: Friends of Irish Freedom, 1918).

him the “master of the world situation” in late October 1918, Wilson did not “mince or soften his words” in sticking to his war policy. “Peace is probably close at hand,” predicted the *Leader*, “but it will not be realized till autocracy has been thoroughly stamped out and freedom of all nations guaranteed.”<sup>84</sup>

As the 1918 Irish Race Convention stated in an appeal to Wilson, “Liberty has the same meaning in Ireland as in America.” They passed resolutions urging Wilson to use his clout to push for Irish freedom. Cohalan closed the convention by wrapping himself in an American flag and calling Wilson “our greatest president.” The Irish and American republics were seen in the same light: “On such high moral grounds is placed Ireland’s right to be heard in her appeal to be true to herself and to her noble traditions by recognizing the Irish Republic.” The *Irish World* advocated voting “for a real American Congress” that would continue to reject pro-British policies like the “English-made League of Nations.”<sup>85</sup>

As early as October 1918, the *Citizen* (which had heretofore been staunchly supportive of Wilson’s war effort) expressed concerns that Wilson was ignoring Irish self-determination while preaching about the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France. In December 1918, Father W.J. McNamee of St. Patrick’s Church in Chicago announced in a speech at the IFC (“to thunderous applause”) that he had “cast his last vote for the Democratic Party in the event of President Wilson and his associates on the peace commission failing to insist upon self-determination for Ireland.” By summer 1919, the *Citizen* was calling on Irish Americans to contribute to the Irish Victory Fund and renounce Wilson and his plans. They wanted to save the country from entangling

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<sup>84</sup> *Irish World*, January 4, 1919; February 1, 1919; February 22, 1919; *Leader*, October 26, 1918.

<sup>85</sup> *Irish World*, May 25, 1918; January 10, 1920; October 9, 1920; Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism*, 77.

alliances and vindicate the honor of the United States. In July 1919, a front-page *Citizen* editorial called on President Wilson to resign.<sup>86</sup>

In early 1919, Wilson's tepid support within Irish circles completely eroded. The issue of Irish independence united the Irish-American press, which came to view the League of Nations as the chief inhibitor of such liberty. National self-determination for eastern European countries, restrictions on American diplomatic flexibility, and the Irish issue all informed this universal loathing of the League of Nations. Irish Americans were angry with Wilson, as they believed he abandoned American war aims with his League of Nations. Wilson avoided confronting the British on the Irish issue, preferring to let the League of Nations maintain the status quo. Wilson confessed to Walsh and Dunne in June 1919 that he regretted making statements that had given people false hope. He had not anticipated so many groups would latch on to these statements.<sup>87</sup>

As with other conflicts to come, Wilson let personal rivalries cloud his judgment. Wilson refused to meet with Cohalan on March 4, 1919, prior to his departure to Europe, because of his antipathy to the Friends of Irish Freedom and personal animosity toward the organization's leaders. In doing this, however, Wilson effectively united Irish-American moderates and nationalists against him. Wilson explained that his snub of Cohalan was meant to endear himself to "decent people." The President refused to promise anything to the other members of the contingent (once Cohalan had left), and he confided in his personal secretary that he wanted to tell the Irish "to go to hell."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Citizen*, October 18, 1918; Father McNamee quoted in *Citizen*, December 6, 1918; July 11, 1919; July 25, 1919.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth R. Maxwell, "Irish-Americans and the Fight for Treaty Ratification," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, no. 4(Winter 1967): 620-641; Carroll, *American Opinion*, 121, 136.

<sup>88</sup> John B. Duff, "The Versailles Treaty and the Irish-Americans," 588-590. The *Citizen* predicted that this would only "stimulate efforts to obtain justice for Ireland" – see *Citizen*, May 30, 1919.

The *Citizen* initially supported Wilson and his League of Nations but eventually turned against it after seeing that Ireland would be considered an internal British issue. The paper drew on the American Revolution for historical analogy, arguing that had Article X been around in the 1770s, France would have been unable to assist the traitorous George Washington. The *Michigan Catholic* also remained pro-Wilson and pro-peace throughout the early stages of the war, coming to his side when the U.S. entered the fray, but rejected his League of Nations on the ground that it conflicted with American ideals. The *Michigan Catholic* bid Wilson farewell in 1921 by saying that “although we detest the odious thing called the “League of Nations,” the author felt bad for the “sadly disillusioned and broken” man that Wilson had become.<sup>89</sup>

The *Monitor* (San Francisco), another Catholic weekly with a large Irish readership, stood behind Wilson during the war and in May 1916 called for a worldwide governmental organization to try and prevent future wars. The *Monitor* admitted that Wilson had stretched the powers of the executive, but it claimed he was doing so “as the representative of democracy” bent on “crushing autocracy and militarism.” Agreeing that “a League of Nations is the only instrument that can curb that power and make the world safe for democracy,” the *Monitor* fully supported Wilson on his trip to the Versailles Conference and his intention to establish a Supreme International Court. By May 31, 1919 though, the *Monitor* had turned on Wilson because of his refusal to fight seriously for Irish freedom, claiming that “Real democracy has received a staggering blow at the Versailles Peace Conference.” The Irish had been betrayed, as “all the purposes and high ideals for which America entered the gigantic struggle have been flouted by the Big Five

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<sup>89</sup> *Catholic Citizen*, May 31, 1919; March 10, 1921.

and President Wilson.” The headline read “Why President Wilson has Failed at Paris Peace Conference.”<sup>90</sup>

The *Brooklyn Tablet* supported Wilson throughout the war era too, as well as his re-election campaign and his trip to Versailles. By June 1919, however, the paper had changed its tune. The Allies failed to rise “to the heights of President Wilson’s ideals,” but it was “regrettable” that Wilson lacked the strength to show the world that “America is intensely interested in Ireland’s future.” The *Chicago New World* supported the idea of a League of Nations but doubted its practicality, feeling that the peace conference would not right the Irish question, which was necessary for solving the larger issues brought to the League of Nations.<sup>91</sup>

The more nationalistic Irish wanted to destroy Wilson, his treaty, and most importantly, his League of Nations by the summer of 1919. FOIF decided to use its million-dollar Victory Fund to defeat the League of Nations, and it printed 1.3 million pamphlets opposing the League. The *Gaelic American* charged that there was no real League of Nations; rather, England was “THE League and the others were the nations.” The paper told its readers that the League of Nations was simply “a British conspiracy against the very existence of these United States.” The *Gaelic American* charged Wilson with attempting a power grab and being the sole arbiter in selling out American principles. Wilson sought to turn the American war aims into “scraps of paper” by leaving Ireland to Lloyd George. When the Democrats nominated James M. Cox for President, the *Irish World* thought it was “almost inconceivable that a worse candidate for the presidency” could have been nominated but that neither man possessed the requisite

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<sup>90</sup> *Monitor*, May 13, 1916; November 17, 1917; November 30, 1918; May 31, 1919.

<sup>91</sup> *Tablet*, June 14, 1919; *New World*, February 14, 1919.

“American traditional sympathy with liberty.” Devoy’s paper called upon readers to “Elect the anti-League Senators” in October 1920, and it called the 1920 election of Republican Warren G. Harding “a condemnation of Wilsonianism.” Wilson had called for the election to be a referendum on the League of Nations, and the *Gaelic American* boastfully reported that his party had lost by six million votes.<sup>92</sup>

The *Irish World* argued that the “British-made Constitution of the League of Nations” undermined American sovereignty by forcing her to fight to protect British Imperialism. It “nullifies the Declaration of Independence.” The article asked whether the United States wanted to “resume the position of a British colony?” Furthermore, it claimed that instead of making the world safe for democracy, Wilson’s League would only make the “British empire safe for autocracy.” The *Citizen* (Chicago) accused the document of being a “camouflage treaty for American defense of British empire,” which was the “most insidious opponent of real Americanism.” In an article entitled “Un-Americanisms in the League of Nations,” the *Citizen* claimed that “The proposed League of Nations is simply a new autocracy. It is not even cloaked in one tattered rag of the discarded Wilsonian, 14-pointed World Democracy.”<sup>93</sup>

The Irish warned against England’s nefarious plan to bring the United States back under its control. They contended that the League of Nations would undo the American Revolution. “Since the day that England lost the revolted colonies she has never ceased plotting to bring the United States once more within the empire. Once she tried open

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<sup>92</sup> O’Grady, *How the Irish Became Americans*, 132–133; *Gaelic American*, March 8, 1919; March 15, 1919; *Irish World*, October 16, 1920; *Gaelic American*, November 20, 1920. Despite the staunch opposition of the Irish-American press to Wilson (with whom Democratic Party candidate James M. Cox was undoubtedly associated) in 1920, it is unlikely that many Democrats actually crossed over and voted with the Republicans, as much of the press claimed – see R.A. Burchell, “Did the Irish and German Voters Desert the Democrats in 1920? A Tentative Statistical Answer,” *Journal of American Studies* 6, no. 2 (August 1972): 153-164.

<sup>93</sup> *Irish World*, March 22, 1919; March 29, 1919; September 26, 1919.

war; again she planned disruption; today she works more insidiously and – more effectively,” read the *Irish World* in March 1920. British propaganda had infiltrated the United States, as “She owns our newspapers, she owns our movies, she works her way into our schools, our colleges, our pulpits. She has thousands of agents. She has scores of methods of employing them. She stirs up racial and religious strife amongst our citizens, she encourages reaction, imperialism, she employs every method to weaken us and then boldly calls upon us for assistance in her schemes against others.” By propping up the British Empire, the League of Nations ensured an English enemy in perpetuity: “By embroiling us at home and abroad she counts upon forcing us either into destruction or to take refuge within the Empire. As long as that Empire lasts so long will England scheme against us.”<sup>94</sup>

The *Irish Press* pleaded that all the vehement opposition to the League of Nations was well-founded but that it would not free Ireland; in addition, “America’s failure to carry out her peace program is a contingency too terrible to contemplate.” America had “first given the war a moral tone,” thus defining Ireland’s effort and meaning that the U.S. was the first place the Green Isle appealed to. By late 1919, though, the *Irish Press* equated Wilson with Judas Iscariot for his treacherous claims that Irish freedom had not been an American war aim. The *Standard* felt that Wilson had failed to use his pugnacity to get a hearing for Ireland at the Versailles conference, instead of using all his combativeness traveling the country trying to sell the League of Nations. The Society of Friendly Sons of St. Patrick cabled President Wilson to ask for a “plebiscite taken under

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<sup>94</sup> *Irish World*, March 20, 1920.

fair conditions of the adult population of the people of Ireland and let the result determine the form of government.”<sup>95</sup>

The *Gaelic American* framed the deliberation over the League quite simply: “For England or America, Senators?” It even called it the “League of Tyrants for Mutual Protection.” The *Irish Standard* listed its reasons for opposing the League of Nations as “un-Americanisms.” These included allowing Britain six votes to America’s one, enslaving small nations to autocracies, and subjecting majorities to minorities (i.e. Irish Catholics to Irish Protestants). Cockran also framed the debate over Ireland and the League of Nations in exclusively American terms. In a speech on “The Cause of Ireland and its Relation to the League of Nations” on August 30, 1919, Cockran expressed relief that “a spirit of genuine Americanism survives in the Senate which will deliver this country from the peril that threatens it and dispel from our horizon the cloud that darkens it.”<sup>96</sup>

Senator William E. Borah wrote to the Irish Race Convention in May 1919 about the League of Nation. His negative views mirrored those of the Convention attendees. The League of Nations was a League to keep the territorial boundaries of the European dictatorships intact. The United States would owe manpower to settle the quibbles and squabbles of these European autocracies, and “the scheme is un-American, unjust to small nations, and instead of being a league for peace is a league to promote war.” It was necessary to fight the League of Nations as a way of loving American independence and

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<sup>95</sup> *Irish World*, March 20, 1920; *Irish Press*, May 24, 1919; August 9, 1919; September 27, 1919; *Irish Standard*, September 20, 1919; Victor J. Dowling (Secretary of the Society of Friendly Sons of St. Patrick) to Woodrow Wilson, November 30, 1918, Folder 5, Box 16, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>96</sup> *Gaelic American*, February 7, 1920; January 17, 1920; *Irish Standard*, October 25, 1919; Cockran, “The Cause of Ireland and its Relation to the League of Nations,” August 30, 1919, speech printed in the *Congressional Record* on September 3, 1919, Folder 2, Box 29, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL.

Irish freedom alike. Borah spoke under the auspices of Irish-American organizations in denouncing the League of Nations. Borah claimed a sympathy for Irish freedom and American independence, and he framed these positions in anti-British language. Borah also got a resolution passed in mid-1919 that insisted upon Irish independence, signaling the rising tide of opposition to the League of Nations.<sup>97</sup>

The Ancient Order of Hibernians felt the League of Nations violated American sovereignty and impaired the Constitution, making it “the most un-American document ever submitted to the American people.” As Senator William Borah put it in his letter to the Irish Race Convention in May 1919, the League of Nations “scheme is un-American, unjust to small nations and instead of being a league to promote peace is a league to promote war. Stop. As we love American independence, as we believe in the freedom of the Irish people, as we believe in liberty everywhere let us fight it.” In a letter from a Patrick Gallagher to Senator Borah in August 1919, he highlights the difference between American liberty and British tyranny. Claiming that American independence was at stake, Gallagher pointed out the need for all Americans “who prefer American freedom to the overlordship [sic] of imperialistic British rule” to unite. After defeating the “autocratic military rule” of Britain during the American Revolution, America stood as a “cradle of human liberty” that was being threatened by the League of Nations. As the *Citizen* (Chicago) said, “The League of Nations, as championed by Wilson, in existence

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<sup>97</sup> Senator William E. Borah to Dr. Andrew Smith of the Irish Race Convention, May 31, 1919, Folder 7, Box 2, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 142-144; Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2002), 168. For a longer discussion of Borah and American foreign policy, see Robert James Maddox, *William E. Borah and American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

in the days when George Washington fought and won, we would be still an English colony.”<sup>98</sup>

Since the Irish had framed the Irish question as an American question, turning a deaf ear to Irish pleas for help was un-American. The *Irish Standard* thus printed a speech from Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska, who tore a copy of the League of Nations to pieces while giving a speech on the necessity of recognizing the Irish Republic. He exclaimed that “There is only one amendment to be added to this un-American instrument, and that is strike out the whole damn thing.” The *Western Catholic* called the League of Nations “socialistic, unpatriotic, anti-American, despotic, dishonest in its methods.” The *Leader* professed that the League of Nations was “camouflage, not for the English-American Alliance, but for the re-establishment of Andrew Carnegie’s Re-United States,” where England would retake control over American sovereignty.<sup>99</sup>

In Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Irish-dominated City Council issued resolutions backing Senators Henry Cabot Lodge and David I. Walsh, who opposed the League with reservations. FOIF had pushed for stronger language, arguing that the League of Nations constituted a “pagan document” that would transform the United States into “the subject colony of the world government framed by President Wilson.” The Irish National Bureau quoted a Patriotic Order of Sons of America resolution praising Lodge for his opposition to the League of Nations and for being a “true American” dedicated to shutting foreign influences out of the American political system. Other Irish leaders mocked the Treaty

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<sup>98</sup> “AOH Members are League Opponents,” AOH Correspondence, Folder 18, Box 1, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; William E. Borah to Dr. Andrew C. Smith of the Irish Race Convention, Folder 7, Box 2, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; Patrick Gallagher to William E. Borah, Folder 7, Box 2, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; *Citizen*, October 29, 1920.

<sup>99</sup> Senator George W. Norris in *Irish Standard*, April 3, 1920; *Western Catholic*, September 17, 1920; *Leader*, September 6, 1919.

fight. The *Chicago Citizen*, while consciously fighting the League of Nations, also pointed out as early as September 1919 that “we sometimes wonder if there is any use in fighting the League of Nations. It seems to be a very weak ‘bairn’ which will die a natural death before the world is much older.”<sup>100</sup>

The *Leader* lauded the Americanism of California Senator Hiram Johnson, who feared entangling alliances would shatter the Monroe Doctrine and the traditional American isolationism. Johnson “spoke as an American” in casting aside all political considerations, calling “upon the people of America to rally to American standards.” By rejecting Wilson and his League of Nations, Johnson was merely demonstrating his belief “in the American Constitution and the ideals of the men who framed it and upheld it.”

The *Leader* also supported the “broad-minded American” William Borah, whose isolationism and opposition to the League of Nations resonated with the *San Francisco Leader*, which agreed with “millions of other good Americans” that the League would “destroy Americanism and make our great and glorious Republic a mere catspaw for the British Empire.” Wilson was trying to shove the League of Nations “down the throats of

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<sup>100</sup> Cole, *Immigrant City*, 199-200; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, October 10, 1919; *Citizen*, September 12, 1919. A Democrat, Walsh stood with Wilson at the 1916 Democratic Convention when the President insisted on a party platform including a repudiation of “hyphenated Americans” – see Dorothy G. Wayman, *David I. Walsh: Citizen-Patriot* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1952), 93. While Walsh initially supported Wilson and his League Covenant (much to the chagrin of many Friends of Irish Freedom branches back in Massachusetts), by October 1919 he had determined it to be “un-American.” Walsh adhered to this stance for the remainder of the crisis, as he prescribed to a purer form of Wilsonian idealism. Walsh felt that the League Covenant betrayed the altruistic motivations for American entry into the war by turning away from the plight of those nations yearning to be free – see John H. Flanagan, Jr., “The Disillusionment of a Progressive: U.S. Senator David I. Walsh and the League of Nations Issue, 1918-1920,” in *The New England Quarterly* 41, no. 4(December 1968): 489-491. Henry Cabot Lodge warmed up to the idea of a League of Nations early in the war but came to be a staunch opponent of the body usurping war declaratory powers from the U.S. Congress and ultimately opposed the treaty as a reservationist – see David Mervin, “Henry Cabot Lodge and the League of Nations,” in *Journal of American Studies* 4, no. 2(February 1971): 201-214. As opposed to those like William Borah, who argued that the League subverted the U.S. to British authority, Lodge felt that Wilson was squandering good relations with the British over his obsession with internationalism – see Karen A.J. Miller, *Populist Nationalism: Republican Insurgency and American Foreign Policy Making, 1918-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 34.

Congress and the American people,” but Hiram Johnson remained steadfastly opposed to the League because “it is a case of upholding American principles, the American Constitution and the Monroe Doctrine.”<sup>101</sup>

According to the *Irish World*, Wilson’s peace proposals were un-American because they repealed long-standing American policy of heeding the advice of George Washington and avoiding European entanglements. “It will mean that all the power of the greatest of republics will be enlisted on the side of the great Empires of the world,” reported the *Irish World*. In April 1917, the *Irish World* was still calling on Americans to obey the advice of Washington and mind their own business. “The Monroe Doctrine is now as important as before the war, and it is the duty of every citizen to block any action which imperils it,” according to the *Irish World*, and “the food of America should feed America first.”<sup>102</sup>

A FOIF circular entitled “Against the League of Nations,” claimed that the “sole purpose” of the Constitution “was to secure liberty, prosperity, and happiness to its people.” Furthermore, the sovereignty of the republic could not be impaired in any way: “Washington’s immortal warning against entangling alliances be scrupulously observed.” A November 1919 pamphlet announced “America Saved” by discussing the defeat of the League of Nations. “England’s belief that a reversal of American traditions, handed down by Washington and the patriots who freed the colonies from English subjection was at last to be accomplished by skillful diplomacy, is shattered,” the pamphlet exclaimed,

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<sup>101</sup> *Leader*, June 7, 1919; June 28, 1919; July 12, 1919. Johnson was an irreconcilable of the isolationist persuasion, staunchly opposed to American meddling in overseas affairs. While this conflicted with the agenda of many Irish-American nationalists, they still praised his opposition to the League of Nations. For a biography of Johnson, see Richard Coke Lower, *A Bloc of One: The Political Career of Hiram W. Johnson* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>102</sup> *Irish World*, January 27, 1917; April 21, 1917.

and ninety-nine out of one hundred people would agree that it was the American Irish who had saved America. “America realized that Irish blooded citizenry not only sought to save Ireland from subjection, but were determined to first save America,” read the Irish National Bureau’s official paper; “American patriotism was the antidote that saved the free and independent life of the nation.” It was necessary to save America from the League of Nations, then “the gratitude of America will insure American assistance for Ireland in the hour of need of the Irish nation and its scattered peoples.”<sup>103</sup>

A FOIF circular from July 1919 pointed out that “The fate of America and the fate of Ireland are bound up in the present iniquitous League of Nations.” Diarmuid Lynch went on to say that it was the duty of the organization to “see the danger and enlighten our fellow citizens and our senators to stand for and by America and not fasten the shackles on Ireland.” “The Covenant is subversive of American sovereignty and American traditions and bars the way to Irish independence,” Lynch declared in a September 18, 1919 letter to the National Council and branches of FOIF, “the statement of President Wilson notwithstanding.” The chief FOIF concern was “Killing this un-American and anti-American Covenant,” and the organization asked in February 1920 that the League of Nations should be submitted to the American people for a direct vote.<sup>104</sup>

On May 17, 1919, the *Irish World* printed a list of twenty-eight reasons why “every American citizen” should oppose the League of Nations. It summarized the

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<sup>103</sup> “Against the League of Nations”, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, November 28, 1919.

<sup>104</sup> Diarmuid Lynch, “Irish Victory Fund,” Folder 2 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Diarmuid Lynch to Members of the National Council and Secretaries of Branches, September 18, 1919, Folder 5 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Branch Letter #7, “League of Nations Covenant,” February 16, 1920, Folder 5 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

reasons for opposing the League of Nations by arguing that “allegiance to foreign powers should not be superior to allegiance to Constitution and laws of United States for American citizens.” By July 1919, the *Irish World* was calling upon Irish-American Democrats to choose between party loyalty and loyalty to America. “Between Jeffersonian principles of Americanism and Wilsonian pro-Britishism,” Irish-American Democrats had to choose, as they could not “consistently oppose the League of Nations and at the same time vote for the political party that favors the rejection of Washington’s sage counsels that warned his countrymen against doing the very thing Woodrow Wilson and Democratic leaders would make the test of loyalty to the Democratic Party.” By August 30, 1919, the *Irish World* announced that in Massachusetts and Missouri, the “Irish-American Democrats [were] in revolt.”<sup>105</sup>

The American Irish felt that they deserved better from a political party that they had helped rejuvenate after the Civil War. “The Democratic Party owes the Irish vote a debt which it can hardly pay,” boasted the Irish National Bureau, which claimed that the Democrats owed to the Irish credit for every electoral victory the party had won since the Civil War. The author alluded to the 1892 official Democratic Party platform, which tendered “profound and earnest sympathy to those lovers of freedom” fighting for independence in Ireland.<sup>106</sup>

FOIF consistently branded the League of Nations as an un-American entity. In a February 1920 internal letter, those opposed to the League of Nations “will of course have the whole-hearted support and cooperation of our people who appreciate the importance of killing this un-American and anti-American Covenant.” On July 30, 1920,

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<sup>105</sup> *Irish World*, May 17, 1919; July 26, 1919; August 30, 1919, bracketed text added.

<sup>106</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, October 31, 1919.

John W. Goff presented a number of resolutions to the FOIF National Council that were unanimously passed. Much of the language within these resolutions pertained to the League of Nations debate. One resolution lauded the Senate for rejecting the League of Nations and thus protecting American institutions, while another called on “all Friends of Irish Freedom who are imbued with the true spirit of American patriotism and preserving our institutions from the dangers and treacheries of European schemes and entanglements” to vote against the League supporters and their party. For their part in defeating the Treaty and the League, the Irish and Irish Americans felt they deserved gratitude from “all Americans who are true to the principles upon which this great Republic was founded.” Irish-American leaders took credit for the defeat of the League and the Democratic Party. The *Irish World* reasoned that the Democratic Party losses in November 1919 were “a clear, sharp, and emphatic condemnation of Wilsonianism,” for the Democrats under Wilson had lost their way. They had thrown off the strict constructionism of Jefferson for the loose whims of a “political dictator.” Author and FOIF Secretary Diarmuid Lynch went on to say that it was the duty of the organization to “see the danger and enlighten our fellow citizens and our senators to stand for and by America and not fasten the shackles on Ireland.” By November 1920, Lynch was declaring Irish-American victory over Wilson and his League of Nations: “The greatest menace to American Sovereignty and to the future of the Irish Republic” had been defeated, as the American people had crushed the “English-made League of Nations.” Lynch credited the American Irish as having “added one more to their brilliant list of achievements in preserving America from the foreigners who sought to enmesh the United States in their imperialistic web and more securely fasten their grip on the nations

struggling to be free.” As the March 31, 1920 FOIF *News Letter* stated, “the attempt of reactionary and un-American influences to make the United States a party to the League of Nations has been thwarted.” The *News Letter* exuberantly announced that the League of Nations had been “permanently laid away in the already well-filled tomb of imperialism.” FOIF branches around the country joined in. In Chicago, for example, over twenty branches gathered September 14, 1919 in what “promises to be the largest of its kind held in Chicago as a protest against the un-American League of Nations. This mass meeting will also give impetus to the final drive in favor of Irish freedom.”<sup>107</sup>

Judge Cohalan claimed that the League’s defeat had “saved America and had done more for the cause of liberty throughout the world than any happening in generations.” The *Gaelic American* printed former American Ambassador to Spain Hannis Taylor’s speech declaring that the League’s defeat constituted “the final overthrow of the Wilsonian dictatorship, which was inaugurated by the ‘King’s speech’” back in March 1913. The defeat of the League of Nations had dealt a death blow to “England’s belief that a reversal of American traditions, handed down by Washington and the patriots who freed the American colonies from English subjection was to be at

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<sup>107</sup> “Branch Letter #7” February 16, 1920, Folder 5 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; John W. Goff, “John W. Goff’s Resolutions to National Council, July 30, 1920,” Folder 5 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Irish Press*, December 6, 1919; *Irish World*, November 15, 1919; “Irish Victory Fund,” Folder 2 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Diarmuid Lynch, Circular to “FOIF,” November 19, 1920, Folder 3 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; FOIF *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau* (Irish National Bureau, clipping file), March 31, 1920, Folder 2, Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Citizen*, September 5, 1919. While they were clearly not singlehandedly responsible for the defeat of the League of Nations in the United States, the vigor with which the Irish protested undoubtedly contributed to the hostile political climate Wilson found upon his return stateside – see Julie E. Manning, *Frank P. Walsh and the Irish Question: An American Proposal* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 3-4.

last accomplished by skillful diplomacy.” And who had saved America: “Ninety-nine out of a hundred will promptly answer: ‘The American Irish.’”<sup>108</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In a comparable manner in both the Civil War and First World War eras, the Irish in America portrayed themselves as more patriotic than their political opponents, thus distancing themselves from accusations of disloyalty. They believed in a universal brand of Americanism open to anyone who desired it, and they branded as un-American anyone who disagreed with this style of Americanism or who threatened its continued success in the world. While America could serve as little more than a symbol, model, and sanctuary for the Irish in the 1860s, the great republic had the potential to free Ireland by 1919. Thus, Irish-American notions of what constituted un-Americanism actually traced the contours of American power and how that related to Ireland itself. Most Irish-American nationalists pragmatically supported the German war effort prior to 1917, but then latched on to Wilson’s statements on national self-determination. They supported the president on his trip to Europe for the peace conference until he abandoned Ireland, at which point they vehemently opposed his League of Nations.

In both eras, the American Irish placed everything they conceived to be un-American under a large English umbrella. America, Ireland, and the American Irish had all changed through the decades, and so had Britain. During the Civil War, the language that Irish Americans and their newspapers used was more idealistic in nature. Britain was un-American because of what it represented; it served as a symbol for everything un-

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<sup>108</sup> *Gaelic American*, November 29, 1919; “America Saved,” *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, November 28, 1919, Folder 8, Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS. The “King’s speech” sarcastically referred to Wilson’s First Inaugural Address.

American. America was a sanctuary for all the oppressed people of the world; it was a beacon of hope and the symbolic manifestation of freedom. Britain was un-American because it represented the antithesis to all of these things. The oppressor that forced people across the Atlantic into the arms of the American sanctuary, Britain was the autocracy that prevented its downtrodden from access to even the most modest of opportunities for self betterment, in contrast to the hopes of millions who sought to live the American Dream. Britain represented the centralized, authoritarian, overbearing form of government that the Irish despised even in a watered-down form (the American Republicans). The nativist notion of distinguishing between its citizens on the basis of ethnicity was also un-American, according to the American Irish, and they morphed the nativists with the British.

By the First World War, Britain was un-American more for its practical handling of the Irish issue than it was for its status as the symbolic inverse of all things American. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, Britain stubbornly resisted Irish independence movements, and chiefly for this reason, it was labeled as un-American. Americanism, by this time, was a worldwide phenomenon. Trampling on the aspirations of oppressed peoples anywhere was now un-American, and Britain was the chief culprit in Irish-American eyes. To insulate themselves from accusations of disloyalty, the Irish accused Wilson of un-American activities during the war. After the war, they hoped to hold Wilson to his stated intentions of national self-determination. When he refused to fight for Irish freedom, however, they attacked his League of Nations as un-American. By opposing this un-American document, they were fighting for an American universalism

that would set Ireland free. The concept of what constituted un-Americanism had evolved alongside the rise of American power.

In the Civil War era, the Irish branded their political opponents as un-American. The Republican Party and President Lincoln were un-American because of the way they clashed with the Irish view of the American sanctuary. They were un-American because of what they did in America. Their exclusive view of citizenship, their affinity for a powerful, centralized government, and their threat to everything for which the Irish-American conception of the American Union stood were all un-American. During the First World War, the political opponents of the Irish were un-American not only due to their nativism but more so because of how their policies affected Ireland. Wilsonianism and his League of Nations contrasted with Ireland's aspirations and were thus, un-American.

Even though the American Irish had been around for generations and were more firmly ingrained into mainstream society, the Irish-American leaders of the First World War era were more concerned with issues in Ireland than ever before. Paradoxically, the reason behind their increased concern for Ireland was not solely due to events in the British Isles but also the entry of America into the arena of world affairs and what that transformation of the American nation meant to its Irish citizens. The Americanism of the Irish greatly influenced their views on the isle of their ancestors, and they constantly touted their Americanism as the reason for their views on the matter. Branded as subversive for their support of the Central Powers, Irish-American nationalists trumpeted their American credentials as a way of discounting accusations of disloyalty. Irish Americans identified the growth of American power with the plight of Ireland. They

merged Irish freedom with American nationalism; they wanted an Irish Republic built on the American model.<sup>109</sup> The Unionism of the Civil War had given way to an internationalism that championed Irish freedom, since now the United States had the capability to make that happen.

As they had during the Civil War era, Irish-American clubs and periodicals insisted that it was the Irish whose culture, religion, history, and politics were the most purely American of any group in the country. Those who agreed with the Irish were celebrated for being true Americans, while those who disagreed with them (and their ideas) were labeled un-American. During the Civil War, Irish Americans championed Unionism; they saw the hopes of freedom around the world (especially in Ireland) tied to the successful sustainment of the American republican experiment. By the First World War era, Irish Americans professed that it was America's duty to practically apply the principles inherent in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence to the entire world, notably Ireland. Therefore, the Irish claimed that by insisting upon Irish freedom and opposing the American president during and shortly after an American war, they were actually being patriotic Americans. By embracing traditional American sympathy for freedom movements around the world, the American Irish protected themselves from accusations of disloyalty while also championing Irish freedom.<sup>110</sup> The Irish would again

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<sup>109</sup> Buckley, *The New York Irish*, 2-6.

<sup>110</sup> After the Great War ended, many Irish nationalists turned to their American brethren to assist them in pushing for an Irish Parliament. According to Thomas Hachey, "Historians are not agreed over the impact which American opinion had in the formulation of Britain's Irish policy at this time, but most would concede that it exercised some influence." Documents from the British Foreign Office confirm this view. A propaganda war broke out between the Irish and the British government, with Irish Unionist Horace Plunkett remarking in a letter from the United States to the British Foreign Office that "in forty years of experience in America I consider that the anti-British sentiment has never been so responsive to Irish propagandism" – see Thomas E. Hachey, *Britain and Irish Separatism: From the Fenians to the Free State, 1867-1922* (Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1984), 233, 235.

use their memory of American history to establish themselves as full-fledged American citizens and to affirm their political identity, which now sought the freedom of Ireland.

## CHAPTER VI – THE “IRISH INFLUENCE SEEMED TO DOMINATE WASHINGTON AND THE AMERICAN CAUSE”: IRISH AMERICANS INTERPET U.S. HISTORY

### Introduction

“In Ireland, every man not bound to England by ties of self-interest was with America, while in America every Irishman was a patriot,” reads Thomas H. Maginnis’s 1913 book, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence*.<sup>1</sup> By this time, Irish-American nationalists had come to view the American Revolution as *the* crucial historical event that encapsulated their national identity, informed their worldview, and held promise for the autonomy of Ireland. By the First World War era, Irish-American leaders sought to use American history to achieve their chief nationalistic goals. The Irish claimed that they had played *the* major role in the American victory over the British in the Revolutionary War. In addition to a long list of historical cameos made by and contributions from Irishmen (and Irish women), the Irish had made up a significant portion of the ranks in Washington’s Continental Army. Washington and other Revolutionary heroes had heaped specific praise on the Irish, who by virtue of their experiences under British oppression were specifically suited to embracing and spreading the values and meaning behind the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

American Irish Historical Society historian Michael J. O’Brien published a number of short articles throughout this era pertaining to anecdotes of Irish bravery during the Revolutionary War, as well as lists of Irish surnames to prove his assertions regarding high levels of Irish participation in the conflict. He published short biographies

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas H. Maginnis, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence* (Philadelphia: The Doire Publishing Company, 1913), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Irishmen on all sides of the debate on exactly how to achieve Irish independence used these tactics.

of Irish contributors from all over the American colonies, often supplementing the stories with lists of surnames from muster rolls. O'Brien expressed the frustrations inherent in his research, noting that much of the evidence was merely lists of names, from which very little in the way of personal experiences could be derived. Nevertheless, he worked on publishing as much anecdotal evidence as possible so as to give the Irish contribution to the Revolutionary War more personal agency.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of their crucial contributions to the American war effort, which would have been unsuccessful without the Irish, the Irish claimed a unique affinity with the Founding Fathers and their views of how the American Republic should look and behave. In their minds, no one could claim to be more American than the people who forged American freedom and earned the accolades of General George Washington. They also claimed a laundry list of other notable American achievements through the decades, from building the American infrastructure to the supposed Irish heritage of an eclectic assortment of American statesmen, inventors, and military heroes. A number of key American principles and ideologies had also originated with Irish Catholics, including American freedom of religion. In addition to helping found the United States, they also claimed to have saved the country during its Civil War. The Irish had supported the American (and anti-British) side in the Civil War and remained champions of Lincoln's idealist view of freedom. Of course, this was selective historical memory at best.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J. O'Brien was born in Fermoy (County Cork), Ireland in 1869 and was educated at St. Colman's College. Arriving in the United States in 1889, O'Brien went to work for the Western Union Company, and he retired from that telegraph company in 1935. In his leisure time, he immersed himself in the study of American history and its Irish connections. Intrigued by the prevalence of Irish names in coastal towns and places that took pride in their service during the Revolutionary War, O'Brien dedicated himself to telling their stories – see A.M. Sullivan, "A Personal Note," in *The Irish at Bunker Hill: Evidence of Irish Participation in the Battle of 17 June 1775* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1968), vii-ix. The American Irish Historical Society published his work frequently, as the primary mission in their 1897 Constitutional preamble was to give the Irish people their proper due in founding the United States – see *The Story of the American Irish Historical Society* (New York: AIHS, 1938).

Irish-American leaders consistently stated that they were, first and foremost, Americans. Additionally, people living in Ireland also qualified as honorary Americans by virtue of their love of American-style freedom and democracy. Many Irish leaders worried that the Irish record in American history had not been adequately entrenched into the minds of the Irish or the American public at large, and a movement to rectify that problem marked the era. For the American Irish to make their case for Ireland on American terms, they needed to bolster their American credentials. Maginnis complained that one of the “faults chargeable” to the Irish race in America was its ignorance of their achievements in American history. He attempted in his book to show that everything distinctly American had not been bequeathed to the country from Anglo-Saxon traditions but rather was more Irish in nature. The first part of the book opined that the American character owed more to the Irish than to the English, while the second part dealt with the Irish who fought in the Revolutionary War. The process of writing the book and studying Irish genealogies provided the American-born Maginnis with “an intimate knowledge of the causes that are the root of Irish hostility to English rule, which, after all, were the basic causes of the American Revolution.”<sup>4</sup> Fighting for Irish freedom *was* fighting for American freedom.

The Irish claimed that they were especially American and thus entitled to comment on world affairs with a higher degree of moral authority than anyone else. They referenced the Irish-American role and the role of Ireland in American history to make this point. Michael J. O’Brien argued that in his 1919 book *A Hidden Phase of American History: Ireland’s Part in America’s Struggle for Liberty* that Ireland and the American colonies were kindred spirits as a result of occupying a similar subjected

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<sup>4</sup> Maginnis, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence*, 3-4.

position within the British Empire. O'Brien pointed out that it was the Irishman Isaac Barre who had deemed revolting colonists the "Sons of Liberty," and that the people of Ireland had rejoiced when the Stamp Act had been repealed. American statesman Benjamin Franklin had traveled to Ireland in 1769 and 1771, and his letters demonstrated the encouragement and solidarity that the Irish people held with the Americans. Likewise, the Continental Congress had sympathized with the Irish people and promised to assist them in overthrowing the British oppressors. British efforts to recruit in Ireland were fruitless, and many Irish soldiers deserted the British to fight for the patriots. Thirty-eight percent of the muster rolls contained Irish surnames, and the Irish as natural-born "rebels" assimilated quickly and easily into the American patriot militias. O'Brien claimed that the Irish language was spoken as often as the English language was in the ranks of Washington's Continental Army, and AIHS President Joseph I.C. Clarke noted in the Introduction that "We are no new-comers in these United States, as is proven in this book." Clarke claimed that the Irish were "among the stalwart builders of the Republic, those intrepid men who cemented the foundations of its structure with their blood and laid its stones with their brain and brawn."<sup>5</sup>

In a St. Patrick's Day speech to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, Irish-American Attorney (and future congressman) Joseph O'Connell proclaimed that "the glory of the American Republic and the part played by the Irish people in bringing into birth a great Nation and making its career so wondrously successful, gives to the celebration of St. Patrick's Day an added interest to the sons of the Gael in the United States of America." According to O'Connell, an Irishman who

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<sup>5</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, *A Hidden Phase of American History: Ireland's Part in America's Struggle for Liberty* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1919), xiii-xiv.

came to America merely became more Irish. By nature, the Irish were sympathetic to the rigors of being an American. “The attitude taken by the Irish exiles in the days of the American Revolution,” claimed O’Connell, “were but the fulfillment and completion of the doctrines and teachings which St. Patrick had so thoroughly impressed upon a people who were naturally possessed of a passionate fondness for eternal justice.”<sup>6</sup>

The Irish claimed that they had earned their Americanism on account of their role in winning America’s greatest battles. “I have heard it said that there was a time in this country when the Irish were regarded as foreigners,” said General Philip W. Maldrinn at the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Charitable Irish Society in 1912. Seventeen thousand Irishmen had fought in American armies during the American Revolution, claimed the General, and he referenced the sacrifices of Montgomery at Quebec, and the sacrifices of Meagher’s Irish Brigade and Sheridan’s Irishmen at the Battle of Franklin. “The Irish have bought and purchased with their blood,” he announced, “the title of American citizenship.” Despite this fact, the Irish deserved credit for more than being brawlers. Despite being called a “fighting race,” which was fair considering “our blood has been spilled everywhere,” Maldrinn claimed that the “true measure of our people’s greatness is their respect for the law and that Irish in America are unfettered by gold, undebauched [sic] by the spoils of office; not misguided but stand for the preservation of the Constitution and for the enforcement of its limitations.”<sup>7</sup> Since they stood for patriotism before profit, the Irish were the truest form of American republicans.

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph O’Connell to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, March 16, 1908, Folder OC 216, Box 3, Joseph O’Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>7</sup> General Philip W. Maldrinn, CIS 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner speech, March 18, 1912, CIS Records, Folder 4 (Social Papers, 1912-1914), Box 3, Massachusetts Historical Society.

The Irish were the opposite of the British, both in 1776 and 1920, and that in and of itself strengthened their Americanism. The Irish had always been noted for their scholarship, religion, and defense of liberty, noted Maginnis, whereas “plundering and oppressing the weak and their land covetousness” typified the Englishman. The Irish had been fighting for their freedom for centuries, as “the Irish conception of an enduring state or nation was seven centuries ahead of the times.” As a result, the Irish were especially suited to fight in the American Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Charitable Irish Society President Louis Watson later noted that “the record of the Irish race in America, the contributions of its sons and daughters to the upbuilding of this great nation, its patriotic blood which has flowed on every American battlefield from Bunker Hill to St. Mihiel, and the countless lives which have been offered as a sacrifice on the altar of this republic, bear abundant testimony to the character of our Americanism.”<sup>9</sup>

Some Irish leaders proclaimed that the roots of early American intellectual Whig ideology had its roots in Ireland. In April 1917, when P.J. Boylan delivered an address to the Ladies Auxiliary AOH of Brooklyn, he professed that not just that the American Founding Fathers’ ideas should be applied to Ireland but that those ideas were Irish to begin with. In addition to mentioning the Irish signers of the Declaration of Independence, the Irish presence in the Continental Army, and Meagher’s Irish Brigade, Boylan noted that many pre-revolutionary Irish immigrants became schoolmasters in the American colonies, and “not a few of the fathers of our country received their education and their ideas of justice and liberty, and their distrust of England, from those early schoolmasters, who were products of the hedge schools of Ireland.” Boylan offered up

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<sup>8</sup> Maginnis, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence*, 11, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Watson speech to CIS, March 17, 1923, CIS Records, Folder 47, Box 3, Burns Library, Boston College.

only William Heron as an example of these teachers, who was born in Cork in 1742 and died in Connecticut in 1819 after teaching at “The Academy” in Greenfield Hill, Connecticut. In response to Heron’s political lessons at the school, a complaint arose that “Master Heron was preaching sedition to the children, and that it was dangerous to allow a man of this kind in our midst.” Of course, “The only effect this Tory complaint had,” claimed Boylan, “was to make the master with even greater frequency and enthusiasm, inculcate in the minds of ‘his boys’ a spirit that was anything but loyal to England.”<sup>10</sup>

Irish Catholic newspapers proclaimed that American-style freedom actually had Catholic origins. The 700-year anniversary of the Magna Carta came in 1915, and the *Boston Pilot* claimed that Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, had been the “the soul of the movement” and the “real author of Magna Charta [sic].” It pointed out that England had been a Catholic country when the Magna Charta was released; after all, “There was no Anglican Church in those days.” The Irish also pointed to the writings of those such as St. Thomas Aquinas, who had incorporated the Aristotelian political thought into “commonplace and axiomatic” Western political traditions in his famous work, *Summa Theologia*. The *Pilot* promoted Professor Alfred O’Rahilly’s paper on “The Democracy of Saint Thomas,” which asserted that St. Thomas Aquinas greatly influenced the doctrines inherent in the U.S. Constitution. In a vague summary of Aquinas and his writings, the author surmised that “Our very American Constitution is built upon such doctrines and surely non-Catholics must have made good use of Saint Thomas to obtain the principles of democracy upon which this Republic rests.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The Irish and the Founding Fathers**

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<sup>10</sup> P.J. Boylan, Address to Ladies’ Auxiliary AOH of Brooklyn, *Irish World*, April 7, 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *Pilot*, June 26, 1915; March 31, 1917; May 22, 1920.

Irish-American leaders used the words of the Founding Fathers themselves to sing the praises of the Irish in America and their assistance in founding the country. They equated this with American patriotism. To speak about the successes of the Irish race in America, Joseph O'Connell said, "Does not lessen the great success of Washington, of Jefferson, of Adams, and of other patriots of those days to proclaim the wonderful activity and the magnificent bravery and courage of their compatriots and associates who participated in their glory and their victories." Instead, O'Connell claimed that "Washington, Jefferson, and Adams [would] join with us today, if they were living, in giving testimony to the great worth and the invaluable assistance contributed by the Irish who were in the British Colonies in the days of the Revolution, for Washington gave the greatest honors to these men." Because of their ancestors' efforts, the American Irish felt entitled to a more prominent place within the upper echelons of American society. As Joseph O'Connell said, "Massachusetts should be proud that more than one-half of her population is today of the same blood and kind as those who fought and bled for American freedom. Massachusetts should honor the sons of the Gael, and she should not be placed in a position of ingratitude to a great people. I sometimes fear that the predominating influences in Massachusetts politics forget the important part played by Irishmen in establishing this Republic." No Irishmen sat on the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and the Irish had just one state representative. Additionally, they had only a few police, probate, and municipal court appointees. O'Connell determined that his comrades in Massachusetts "are not filled with the same patriotism as was Washington and his associates."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph O'Connell to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, March 16, 1908, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Joseph O'Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

When certain elements of the population slighted the Irish heroes of the American Revolution, the Irish used Washington's words to counter these assertions. For example, in questioning why Commodore John Barry's name had been left off a list of naval officers honored by having their names inscribed on the Arlington Memorial Arch, the *Michigan Catholic* pointed out that George Washington had made Barry the ranking officer of the navy. As they saw it, if the Father of the Country had taken this action, that spoke for itself on the issue of Barry's contributions. The Irish felt slighted that they had to continually fight for their own history. The *Leader* (San Francisco) called for a "Commodore Barry Day" in honor of the great "Father of the American Navy," who was "due in a great measure the wonderful victory of the Revolutionary War." The article called for all Irish societies to give this their immediate attention. When Commodore Barry was left out of a naval recruiting poster photograph (John Paul Jones, Admiral William Sims, and David Farragut graced the poster), in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Leader* branded it a snub of an American naval hero of greater significance than any other: "Must the Irish and Irish-Americans even fight in this country for the recognition which is due their race?"<sup>13</sup>

Much of the historiography on Commodore Barry has been hagiographical. One biographer, for example, credits Barry with being the father of the American Navy, a title normally ceded to John Paul Jones. Little is known of Barry's early life; the date of his birth has even been disputed, though most biographers accept it as 1745 in County Wexford. Barry's biography has been propagandized by certain elements (including the Irish) seeking to create an American Catholic hero. Thus, many biographers had

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<sup>13</sup> *Michigan Catholic*, September 1, 1921; *Leader*, September 11, 1915; May 31, 1919.

neglected his achievements while overplaying his religion.<sup>14</sup> The Irish added his nationality to that.

Washington's adopted son could speak to affirm their participation in the Revolutionary War. Since "it is the fashion nowadays in certain quarters to belittle the work of the Irish in the Continental Army," and so many had promoted the myth that the majority of the Irish who fought under Washington were Scotch-Irish, the *Irish World* quoted Washington's stepson, George Washington Parke Custis, to make their point. "When our friendless standard was first unfurled for resistance, who were the strangers that first mustered round its staff, and when it reeled in the fight, who more bravely sustained it than Erin's generous sons?" Custis asked in an 1826 speech, continuing "I cap the climax of their worth, when I say, Washington loved them, for they were the companions of his toils, his perils, his glories in the deliverance of his country."<sup>15</sup>

The Irish contended that Washington supported the liberation of Ireland as a result of his experiences with Irish soldiers during the Revolutionary War. This helped Irish leaders in drawing parallels between the patriot cause in 1776 and the Irish cause in 1920. The *Irish World* claimed that "never lived a greater champion of Irish independence than George Washington." During the tougher times of the American Revolution, both Washington and General Lafayette seriously contemplated a Franco-American expedition to Ireland, to the end of establishing that country as an independent republic. Not surprisingly, it was "to be regretted that this project was not carried into effect at the time." The article claimed that the reason for this was the reverence Washington had

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<sup>14</sup> See Joseph Gurn, *Commodore John Barry: Father of the American Navy* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1933); William Bell Clark, *Gallant John Barry, 1745-1803: The Story of a Naval Hero of Two Wars* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938).

<sup>15</sup> George Washington Parke Custis in *Irish World*, February 21, 1920.

gained for the Irish as a result of their contributions to his army. “No doubt it was through his constantly coming into contact with Irishmen in the Revolutionary Army that Washington came to love the Irish people and to wish for their deliverance from the same power the United States was then fighting,” stated the article.<sup>16</sup>

Over and above claiming symbolic ties to George Washington, Irish Catholics also fabricated his supposed Irish Catholic heritage. The *Monitor* re-printed a piece from the *Indiana Catholic* that went as far as to actually claim that Washington was Irish and not English as “is frequently erroneously stated in some American School histories.” His family name had actually been De Weslington, a Belgian surname. The De Weslington’s settled in Ireland and were forced to Anglicize their name. One relative served in Irish Parliament in 1723, and his mother Mary Ball was of Irish extraction, her father being born in Cork. The *Michigan Catholic* proudly reported that Washington’s great-grand-nephew was ordained a priest in July 1920 and would be assigned duty in Richmond.<sup>17</sup>

Michael J. O’Brien implied that George Washington was actually Irish by stating that many Washington families came from Ireland, including those related to the Father of the Country. O’Brien collected the names of all the Irish officers and enlisted men in the “Virginia Regiment,” organized by Colonel George Washington in 1754 for service in the French and Indian War. Ten Irish officers under Washington’s command had been guaranteed land grants by Governor Dinwiddie. In addition, Washington later appointed his second cousin Dennis McCarthy to a vacant Lieutenant position in 1756. McCarthy’s cousin was Augustine Washington, George’s father. O’Brien published a book exclusively on Washington’s love for the Irish in 1937. Of course, George Washington

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<sup>16</sup> *Irish World*, February 21, 1920.

<sup>17</sup> *Monitor*, February 26, 1921; *Michigan Catholic*, May 15, 1920.

was English. He came from a long line of staunch royalists. In fact, his family never would have left England had it not been for the English Civil Wars of the 1640s; his great-grandfather emigrated to the colonies *because* he refused to rebel against the king. Furthermore, the distinguished Washington family contained numerous English nobles.<sup>18</sup>

In keeping with their American universalism, Irish leaders labeled bigotry as un-American and used their interpretation of the American Revolution to make their case. They employed Revolutionary symbolism as another way of making their case. In an article blasting bigotry and treason in the American press (*The Menace*, *Jeffersonian*, and *Protestant Magazine* especially), the *Tablet* used the infamous Benedict Arnold to make the connection. “Bigotry and treason go hand in hand. Everyone knows that Benedict Arnold was a traitor. Not so many are aware that he was the bitterest of bigots,” the *Tablet* pointed out. Tom Watson’s Georgia periodical, heretofore famous for its anti-Catholic views, advocated going to jail before capitulating to conscription. Meanwhile, Catholics had enlisted to defend the country en masse. Since the Guardians of Liberty and newspapers like that of Watson’s had “decided to leave the guardianship of the country’s liberty to our Catholic soldiers and sailors,” Watson, like Arnold, was a bigot and a traitor.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Irish and Their Contributions to the American Revolution**

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<sup>18</sup> Michael J. O’Brien, “The Virginia Regiment – Commanded by Colonel George Washington,” *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 25 (1926): 110-115; Michael J. O’Brien, *George Washington’s Associations with the Irish* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1937); Willard Sterne Randall, *George Washington: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Tablet*, June 9, 1917. Watson was the Populist Vice Presidential nominee in 1896 (with William Jennings Bryan headlining the ticket), though he is best known after 1900 for his racist and anti-Catholic views.

Irish-American leaders claimed that the Irish had played a pivotal role in swinging the Revolutionary War to the American side. By the First World War era, they made this claim ad nauseum in their attempt to trumpet up support for an Irish republic. Nothing could be more American than contributing to the founding of the American Republic. As significant contributors to the founding of the country, the Irish could use American history in fighting for Irish freedom. The extent to which their claims were accurate matters less than the fact that they made such claims with emphatic frequency. In calling for a complete history of the role of the Irish in the American Revolution (despite the fact that several works that would easily qualify had recently been published), the *Irish Press* noted early in 1919 that it would be only seven years before the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American independence (a time frame the paper noted would probably be insufficient when considering “the magnitude of the task”). “Foremost among the foreign nations which will work hand in hand with Columbia on this occasion is our sister Republic – Ireland,” claimed the author, who argued that on account of the “imperialistic despotism” of British rule over Ireland, “the celebration has a very deep meaning for Ireland, deeper, perhaps, than it has for America herself.”<sup>20</sup>

The Irish claimed an American heritage dating back long before there had been a United States. Joseph O’Connell dictated that the Irish had immigrated to America in significant numbers and began swimming in the American gene pool as early as the Cromwellian period. According to O’Connell, 550 Irish from the Southern cities and towns like Cork, Youghal, Kinsale, Wexford, and Waterford had been “infused into the

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<sup>20</sup> *Irish Press*, February 1, 1919. Moderate Shane Leslie rejected these arguments, arguing that the early American populace was Anglo-Saxon and aristocratic. Only the antebellum influx of immigrants had changed this, he asserted. He even argued that Catholic emancipation and Chartism in England were “complementary to Americanism” and represented the liberalist link between the two countries – see Leslie, *The Irish Issue in Its American Aspect*, 122-128, 134-135.

primal stock of the American people” as indentured servants during the Cromwellian period in England. O’Connell denoted that history had not been well told in the United States, and historians who had merely been writing for “their friends” had neglected to recognize the abundance of Irish names in colonial American records. Many of those Irish names blended in by the time the histories were written. Too many of those with names like Smith or Taylor had been assumed to be English, said O’Connell, when “9 out of 10 are just as Irish as any Murphy.” By the time of the American Revolution, Irish blood coursed through American veins. O’Connell claimed that while most American leaders during the American Revolution came from English ancestry, the “rank and file, came from the shores of Ireland.”<sup>21</sup>

O’Connell mentioned Irish-born patriots like General Henry Knox, Stephen Moyland, General John Sullivan, Commodore John Barry, and General William Thompson but emphasized the common soldier in claiming that “it is undisputed evidence that more than one half of Washington’s army were born in Ireland.” While half of Washington’s army was Irish, claimed O’Connell, and many key leaders also hailed from the Emerald Isle. The first general commissioned by the Continental Congress was General William Thompson of Londonderry, and General Henry Knox (“No man was closer or nearer to George Washington”) was the son of a founder of the CIS. Stephen Moylan and his Dragoons “form the basis of the stories told in our schoolbooks.” John Sullivan and Richard Montgomery were infantry heroes of Irish descent.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph F. O’Connell speech, “The Irish in the American Revolution,” December 15, 1913, Folder December 1913, Box 8 (Business Papers, 1913-1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph O’Connell to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, March 16, 1908, Joseph O’Connell Papers, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Burns Library, Boston College; Joseph F. O’Connell

Henry Knox was born in Boston in 1750; he would become Washington's chief artillery officer during the Revolutionary War. He did not hail from Irish Catholic ancestry. His father, William Knox, was of Scotch descent (they were Presbyterians) and left Derry (in the north of Ireland) in 1729. He arrived in 1730 with Reverend John Morehead's group, where they established the Church of Presbyterian Strangers on Bury Street. John Sullivan was born in 1740 to Margery (born in Cork in 1714) and Master John Sullivan (born in Limerick in 1690 after his father was exiled to France (where he died in 1691) following the loss of Limerick to William of Orange, who had emigrated in 1731. He would become a major general and governor of New Hampshire.<sup>23</sup>

The Irish liked to claim that it was the Irish who had actually started the Revolutionary War several months prior to the Battle of Lexington. O'Connell told the story of the Irish who had skirmished with British troops in December 1774 at Fort William and Mary: "It was Irish intrepidity and Irish valor that first dared attack the British lion; it was Irish eloquence which swept the colonies into the Declaration of Independence, and now we come down to what the Irish did in helping to carry the Revolution through to success." The famous "shot heard 'round the world" at the Battle of Lexington had actually not been the first skirmish in the Revolutionary War. Rather, four months earlier, in December of 1774, the Revolutionary War had actually started in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. There a group of American soldiers, under the command of Irishman John Sullivan, had attacked Fort William and Mary and captured the

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speech, "The Irish in the American Revolution," December 15, 1913, Folder December 1913, Box 8 (Business Papers, 1913-1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>23</sup> North Callahan, *Henry Knox: General Washington's General* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958), 16; Mark Puls, *Henry Knox: Visionary General of the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2; Charles P. Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution: John Sullivan of New Hampshire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 1-2.

weapons and ammunition inside. The guns and ammunition taken were used by American troops at the Battle of Bunker Hill, “and this deed on the part of Sullivan and his followers should be commemorated as the first armed resistance to England, and should never be overlooked.” The war then came to a close at the hands of Irish troops serving under Rochambeau and Lafayette at Yorktown. “In the struggle for American freedom, it was the Irish spirit that made the cause successful,” O’Connell stated, and “never should an American forget” this.<sup>24</sup>

Both direct and indirect Irish contributions to Yorktown existed. General Benjamin Lincoln, who was second in command at Yorktown, was actually rescued in New Jersey earlier in the war by Irishman Patrick Cavanaugh of Pennsylvania. In mid-1780, eight battalions of infantry in the French professional army, totaling 5500 men, arrived under the command of General Comte Jen-Baptiste de Rochambeau. This included a hodge-podge collection of five hundred foreign soldiers under the Duc de Lauzun; among these volunteers were many men from Ireland, Sweden, and Poland. The cohesive cooperation between the American troops and these “French” forces, as well as de Grasse’s and de Barras’s fleets, forged victory at Yorktown. The shock of this defeat convinced many in Britain to consider the matter a lost cause, and they moved toward reconciliation with the rebels.<sup>25</sup>

Other leaders claimed that the war had started earlier and that it was the Irish who deserved the credit. The Honorable Martin H. Glynn claimed in a 1920 speech at the

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph F. O’Connell speech, “The Irish in the American Revolution,” December 15, 1913, Folder December 1913, Box 8 (Business Papers, 1913-1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; O’Connell, March 24, 1912 speech, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Joseph O’Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. O’Brien, “Some Stray Historical Tidbits of the American Revolution,” *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 17(1918): 123; John D. Grainger, *The Battle of Yorktown, 1781: A Reassessment* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2005), 15-16; Jerome A. Greene, *The Guns of Independence: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2005), 323-324.

Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Dinner that the real first battle of the American Revolution occurred five years earlier at the Battle of Golden Hill. The New Yorkers who erected liberty poles and fought against the Redcoat backlash were honorary Irish rebels, according to Glynn. This first battle of the American Revolution “was not fought at Lexington; it was not fought at Concord; it was fought right here in New York, at William and John Streets, and the English soldiers were beaten by the Sinn Feiners of New York.” Many New Yorkers also called the Battle of Golden Hill the first battle in the American Revolution. In his discussion of the battle, however, historian Robert Ketchum did not mention any Irish.<sup>26</sup>

In labeling these patriotic scrappers “Sinn Feiners,” Glynn placed them in solidarity with those fighting for Irish freedom in 1920, tying the movements together. Not only had the Irish started the Revolutionary War, they finished it too. When twenty-eight British regiments under Cornwallis surrendered in 1781, their colors were “received by an Irishman” named Robert Wilson. Furthermore, in response to those who questioned the Irish role in the American Revolution, Glynn asked “How comes it that Washington heaped such honors upon Irishmen, how comes it that Washington had so many Irishmen around him, how comes it that Washington placed Irishmen in responsible places, in every battle which he fought?”<sup>27</sup>

The Irish also had a hand in the Boston Massacre and Boston Tea Party. In claiming that the Irishman had become “an American citizen to an extent that few other nationalities do,” the *Irish Press* pointed out the contributions of several Irishmen on the

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<sup>26</sup> Martin H. Glynn, speech at 1920 Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Dinner, Folder 4, Box 29, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; Robert Ketchum, *Divided Loyalties: How the American Revolution Came to New York* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 224-228.

<sup>27</sup> Martin H. Glynn, speech at 1920 Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Dinner, Folder 4, Box 29, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL.

road to Revolution. Those who participated in the Boston Tea Party had met in an inn owned by the Irishman John Duggan and Irishman Patrick Carr was a martyr to American freedom after being killed in the Boston Massacre. Patrick Carr was indeed an Irish immigrant, although he actually played a major role in acquitting the Redcoats who had fired on the crowd and ultimately ended his life. While Carr had not participated in the events that triggered the shootings, his deathbed exoneration of the shooters was relayed in the testimony of Dr. John Jeffries. Jeffries also testified that Carr had told him that he had seen similar instances where troops had fired into crowd in his native Ireland but that he “had never seen them bear half so much before they fired in his life.” In the waning hours of his life, Carr forgave the soldier who had shot him, for Carr felt the man had fired out of self-defense and not out of personal malice toward him or anyone else. This testimony “powerfully aided the defense.”<sup>28</sup> This part of the story was conveniently left out of the report by the *Irish Press*.

According to the *Irish Press*, the first naval battle in the Revolutionary War had also been won by the Irish, and Washington had appointed two Irishmen as his first aides-de-camp. Maurice O’Brien of Cork was the father of the five boys, who upon hearing of the Battle of Lexington, captured the British schooner in Machias Bay in May 1775, “which was the first naval victory and the first blow struck on the water for independence.” Additionally, the First Troop of Philadelphia was one of the first organizations to offer service to Washington; ten Irishman and six members of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick comprised a significant proportion of its twenty-eight members. Washington’s first aide-de-camp had been Joseph Reed, the son of an Irish

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<sup>28</sup> *Irish Press*, April 5, 1919; Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), 285-286.

immigrant, and his second was Stephen Moylan of Cork, who would go on to fame as the colonel of the Fifth Dragoons. Born in Trenton, New Jersey, Joseph Reed would become a lawyer, member of the Continental Congress, and chief executive of Pennsylvania in addition to his role as Washington's aide-de-camp. His ancestors also came from the north of Ireland though; Reed's grandfather first immigrated from Carrickfergus to Massachusetts in 1671.<sup>29</sup>

The *Catholic Messenger* printed an essay from Dr. McAleer outlining the many, varied, and unusual contributions and cameos of Irishmen throughout early American naval history. The first American privateer during the American Revolution was the "Game Cock," a ship fitted in Newbury, Massachusetts by Nathaniel Tracy, the son of Patrick Tracy of Wexford. The first American ship to dock in Chile was commanded by former CIS President Bernard Magee in 1792, and the first American ship that traveled to Japan was commanded by Captain John Devereaux of Wexford, who was also the first American sea captain to fly the Stars & Stripes in the Mediterranean Sea. Maurice O'Brien's five sons won the first naval battle of the American Revolution on May 11, 1775 in Machias Bay, and Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the hero of Lake Erie, was born to an Irish mother.<sup>30</sup>

Hoping to establish a deeper connection between the two movements, Irish leaders claimed Ireland did all it could for the patriotic cause. Ireland was an American base during the Revolutionary War, claimed the *Gaelic American*. John Paul Jones had sailed out of Carrickfergus Harbor in 1778 when he sunk the British ship the *Ranger* and captured half a dozen other ships. According to English historian James Anthony Froude,

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<sup>29</sup> *Irish Press*, April 5, 1919; *Catholic Messenger*, May 22, 1919; John F. Roche, *Joseph Reed: A Moderate in the American Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Catholic Messenger*, May 22, 1919. I have been unable to determine any more about Dr. McAleer.

“The American flag was seen daily fluttering in insolence from the Irish coast anywhere between Londonderry and Cork.”<sup>31</sup>

Irish leaders felt that the United States showed insufficient gratitude to the Irish for their contributions to the nation’s history. A FOIF flyer addressed this by listing eighteen reasons why America should love Ireland. These rationales staked an Irish claim and heritage in America. The flyer maintained that there were one hundred times more Irish than any other nationality in Washington’s Army prior to the arrival of the French, that the first naval battle of the American Revolution was won by the five sons of Matthew O’Brien, and that Commodore John Barry, the father of the American Navy, was born in Ireland. The flyer claimed that Irishman Joseph Reed was the first aide-de-camp appointed by the “immortal Washington,” that Irish ports supplied American privateers during the Revolutionary War, and that the first woman to receive a pension for her services to the United States was Irish-born Margaret Cochran. Cochran was not the only Irish woman to join in the fray. In 1916, the *Irish World* printed a story by Michael J. O’Brien on Margaret Corbin, an Irishwoman and “the first of her sex to fight for American liberty.” She had helped her husband load guns during the siege on Fort Tryon until he was killed. At that point, she took his place firing until some grapeshot left her seriously wounded. She died around the year 1800.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> James Anthony Froude in *Gaelic American*, October 6, 1917. Froude was the author of *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. William J.A. Maloney, a native of Ireland who fought in the British Army during the Great War and had ties to Irish nationalist organizations in the United States, quoted Froude on the first page of Maloney’s 1918 pamphlet-sized call for Irish freedom, *The Irish Issue*. Froude had concluded that “the question in both countries was substantially the same; whether the Mother Country had a right to utilize her dependencies for her own interests irrespective of their consent,” a sentiment with which Maloney concurred. The legacy of the American Revolution as it related to Ireland figured centrally in the narrative – see William J.M.A. Maloney, M.D., *The Irish Issue* (New York: *America*, 1918), 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Issued by the Progressive League?” Folder 4 (printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Irish World*, October 28, 1916. The first name of Mr. O’Brien varied depending on the Irish writer apparently.

Another typical story involved the young Irish immigrant, Captain Bernard Gallagher. Running away from his home in Ballyshannon, Ireland after his father tried to force him into the priesthood, Captain Gallagher shipped as a cabin boy in the American colonies and captained a merchant vessel when the Revolutionary War broke out. “Appreciating the justice of the American cause,” Gallagher supported the American patriots and ended up sacrificing a great deal for their cause. In 1781, after loading a ship with corn to supply Yorktown, an English cruiser approached Captain Gallagher with the intention of paying for the load of corn. Instead of allowing the food to fall into enemy hands, Gallagher “scuttled” his own ship and attempted to escape the enemy’s grasp. After being caught, he spent the final two years of the war locked up in Halifax.<sup>33</sup>

Captain Patrick Dennis was charged with building ships at Poughkeepsie for the patriots to use, and in 1776, he was asked by the New York Committee of Safety to build obstructions in the East River so as to disrupt British vessels attempting to pass through. Irishman Michael Connolly, the grandfather of Charles Evans Hughes and a Lieutenant serving in Colonel Dubois’ New York regiment, was instrumental during the winter of 1777 in purchasing and supplying arms and warm clothing to the American troops. Captain Michael Dwyer of New Hampshire was an agent in charge of purchasing arms and ammunition for the inhabitants of his town of Rumney, New Hampshire. The five Butler brothers out of Kilkenny, Ireland distinguished themselves in service of the patriot cause as well, four of whom served as officers from Pennsylvania. Richard Butler was Lieutenant-Colonel of Morgan’s celebrated rifle corps at Saratoga and eventually rose to the rank of Major-General. The contributions of these five brothers, noted Michael J. O’Brien, made for a “thrilling chapter of American history, a truly Irish chapter.” In

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<sup>33</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, February 13, 1920.

typical fashion, O'Brien used the words of the patriots themselves to summarize the contributions of the Irish: as Edmund Pendleton, member of the Continental Congress from Virginia, said in a letter to General Henry Lee in May 1776 in reference to the difficulties in raising troops in parts of Virginia, "I do not believe that many of the native Virginians will offer themselves; the Irish, I am persuaded, will enlist in crowds."<sup>34</sup>

Michael J. O'Brien considered it his mission to "enlighten those who think the Irish had no part in the War of the Revolution," and in doing so, he placed the Irish at the scene of some of America's greatest victories. One such Irish contribution was Captain Thomas Procter's famous artillery unit, which organized in Philadelphia in October 1775 and took part in the capture of the Hessians at Trenton on Christmas night, 1776. Later designated as the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Artillery, the unit fought at the battles of Bound Brook, Brandywine, and Germantown, with smaller detachments fighting at numerous other battles. O'Brien notes that on only one list was the ethnicity of each soldier listed, a list containing 206 names; thirty-seven percent of the troops listed were Irish. Exclusive of that tabulation were 114 other Irish surnames, though country of origin could not be confirmed for them.<sup>35</sup>

O'Brien published numerous tales of Irish-American valor during the Revolutionary War, including the schoolmaster Patrick Hogan of New York (who tutored Dutch children prior to the war), Sergeant William Murphy of Virginia and the rest of the Murphy's from that colony, Christopher O'Brien of Virginia, Captain Patrick O'Flynn (friend of General Washington) of Delaware, and the Irish soldiers (and not Scotch-Irish

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<sup>34</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, "Some Stray Historical Tidbits of the American Revolution," 121-136, quotes from 133, 135.

<sup>35</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, "Procter's Artillery in the Revolutionary War," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 176-178.

or Ulster Scots) of the Cumberland County, Pennsylvania militia. In addition, O'Brien published stories on the Seventh Regiment of Pennsylvania that had the highest proportion of Irish names of any unit in the Continental Army (and a unit from which Irish-born Private Francis McDonnell captured the English flag at the "impregnable fortress" Stony Point), the high proportions of the names Kelly, Burke, and Shea in the Massachusetts units, and Captain Patrick McGriff of South Carolina (who served under General Edward Lacey), and distinguished himself in campaigns against Tarleton and Cornwallis, and Major Patrick Carr of Georgia, who was rumored to have slain over one hundred Tories with his own hands during the war.<sup>36</sup>

Irish leaders also used the words of commentators to make the point that they were ideally suited to be Americans, quoting the French Marquis de Chartellux in an article on the affinity between the Irish and American people. "The Irish of America are now and have always been a most loyal and patriotic element of our people," said the *Boston Pilot*. Over ninety percent of Irishmen immediately apply for American citizenship, the paper claimed in 1919, as opposed to as low as eight percent for other nationalities. The article quoted Chartellux as saying, "An Irishman, the instant he sets foot on American soil, becomes an American. This was uniformly the case during the

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<sup>36</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, "Patrick Hogan, Schoolmaster and Revolutionary Soldier," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 89-92; Michael J. O'Brien, "The Record of Sergeant William Murphy," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 25(1924): 154-156; Michael J. O'Brien, "The Murphy's in Virginia: Patrick Murphy, a Brave Soldier of the Virginia Continental Line," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 103-106; Michael J. O'Brien, "Christopher O'Brien, Revolutionary Soldier," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 27(1928): 70-72; Michael J. O'Brien, "Captain Patrick O'Flynn, Friend of General George Washington," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 92-102; Michael J. O'Brien, "The Cumberland County, Pennsylvania Militia in the Revolution" *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 121-124; Michael J. O'Brien, "Francis McDonnell, a Son of Erin, Captured the English Flag at Stony Point," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 118-120; Michael J. O'Brien, "The Kellys, Burkes, and Sheas of the Massachusetts Line," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 107-110; Michael J. O'Brien, "Major Patrick Carr and Captain Patrick McGriff: Two Gallant Officers of the Georgia Continental Line," *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21(1922): 93-96.

war. While Englishmen and Scotchmen were treated with jealousy and distrust, even with the best of recommendations of zeal and attachment to the cause, the native of Ireland stood in need of no other certificate than his dialect.”<sup>37</sup>

The Irish also claimed that they placed patriotism above pecuniary interests and played a significant role in financing the American Revolution. The Irish had “opened their purses” to the cause so regularly that “on more than one imminent occasion Congress itself, and the very existence of America probably owed its preservation to the fidelity and firmness of the of the Irish.” When the Continental Army needed funds early on, The Hibernian Society and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick contributed 112,000 of the necessary 315,000 pounds. The Bank of North America, which funded the Continental Congress, Army, and Navy, depended on financial assistance from men such as Irishman Oliver Pollock. One of the wealthiest men of his day, Pollock invested much of his fortune “in order that the fight of the Colonists for their rights might go on.” According to Maginnis, Pollock made over \$300,000 in advances to the Continental Congress and Virginia, about one-third of which was never repaid. Pollock is another “Irishman” who hailed from the northern region of the Emerald Isle. A member of a Scotch-Irish family of small landholders, Pollock emigrated from Coleraine to Carlisle, Pennsylvania (known as “the capital of Scotch-Irish settlements”) in 1760, when he was twenty-three years of age. Edward Fox of Dublin had also made significant advances to men like Robert Morris, “the financier of the Revolution,” who would come to owe Fox about \$900,000. Numerous other Irishmen contributed to the “Bank of Pennsylvania plan” to finance the American Revolution. During the “times that try men’s souls” in the winter of 1776-1777, it was the Irish that came to Washington’s rescue by supplying him with eighteen

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<sup>37</sup> *Pilot*, March 29, 1919.

hundred riflemen and to supplement his starving troops, the Sons of Saint Patrick also sent him \$24,000 in gold.<sup>38</sup>

Irish leaders were fond of touting the patriotic record of Irish-American organizations during the Revolutionary War. No Irish organization opposed the American Revolution, Joseph O'Connell proudly pointed out. Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago President John P. McGoorty wrote to his organization from La Paz, Bolivia in March 1917 to say that the Bolivian people were freedom-lovers just like nationalities across the globe, including "the ancestors of the members of the Irish Fellowship Club, who had fought in the Revolutionary War."<sup>39</sup>

The oldest Irish-American organization was the Charitable Irish Society, which proudly boasted of its Revolutionary War record. The Charitable Irish Society was formed in 1737 "to cultivate a spirit of unity and harmony among all resident Irishmen and their descendants in the Massachusetts Colony; and, while adhering to the fundamental principle which underlies all governments, - obedience to properly constituted authority, - to advance morally and socially the interests of the Irish people." During the Revolutionary War, the Society suspended its meetings. Though the society recognized that the pen was mightier than the sword, that did not "always preclude the use of the weaker, yet more dreaded weapon." The members of the society were "enacting rather than writing history" as they "took sides with the Revolutionary patriots

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<sup>38</sup> *Pilot*, March 29, 1919; *Irish Press*, April 5, 1919; Joseph F. O'Connell speech, "The Irish in the American Revolution," December 15, 1913, Folder December 1913, Box 8 (Business Papers, 1913-1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Maginniss, *The Irish Contribution to America's Independence*, 96-97; James K. McGuire, *The King, the Kaiser, and Irish Freedom* (New York City: The Devin-Adair Company, 1915), 233; James Alton James, *Oliver Pollock: The Life and Times of an Unknown Patriot* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1937), 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph O'Connell to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, March 16, 1908, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Joseph O'Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College; John P. McGoorty (from La Paz, Bolivia) to IFC, March 16, 1917, Folder 3 of 4 (Reports), Box 1, IFC Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

of 1775, and names of its members are borne upon the rolls of those who fought throughout the war which secured our independence.” The flyer then printed a selection from an October 1784 meeting of the society in order to “once for all do away with the foul suspicion, engendered of malice and kept alive by ignorance and prejudice, that the Irish-Americans – ‘persons of foreign birth or foreign extraction’ – can ever be wanting in allegiance to the Nation of which they form a part, or that in a conflict with any foreign power whatever, the Irish-Americans could be derelict in their fealty to this Republic.” Below that was a speech by President William Mackey on the occasion of the re-convening of the Society after the Revolutionary War. After ten years gone (including eight years of war), Mackey welcomed the members back and bragged about their accomplishments. “We have conquered one of the greatest and most potent nations on the Globe so far as to have peace and Independency,” said Mackey, who called for resiliency in asking that “our friends, countrymen in Ireland, behave like the Brave Americans till they recover their liberties.”<sup>40</sup> In 1784, the American Irish had already made the comparison between the Irish and American struggles for freedom.

The Declaration of Independence held an especially special place in the heart of the Irish. They claimed to have had a special role in its pronouncement, and they wanted to apply its specific grievances to the contemporary situation in Ireland. A Friends of Irish Freedom flyer claimed that there had been nine signers of the Declaration of Independence, that Irishman Charles Thomson transcribed the first copy of the Declaration of Independence from Jefferson, that Irishman John Dunlap had been the first printer of the document, and that Irishman John Dixon was the first to read it aloud to

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<sup>40</sup> 1889 Annual Ball of the Charitable Irish Society flyer, Folder 1, Box 1, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

citizens in Philadelphia on July 6, 1776. The *Catholic Messenger* echoed many of these assertions. It claimed that “the perennial secretary of the Continental Congress” was Charles Thomson of Maghera, who transcribed the first copy of the Declaration of Independence. John Nixon, whose father hailed from County Wexford, was the first Irishman to read aloud the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia on July 6, 1776. John Dunlap of County Strabane was the first to print the Declaration of Independence, and the first person to publish it with facsimiles of the signatures was John Binns, an exile of 1798. Joseph O’Connell claimed there had been eleven Irish signers of the Declaration of Independence, including John Hancock, Edward Rutledge, Thomas Lynch, Charles Carroll, Thomas McKeon, George Read, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton, John Hart, George Taylor, and James Smith. Irishman Charles Thompson had been the chief figure in bringing the Continental Congress and the Continental Army together; Adams and Jefferson both credited Thompson with being “the life of the cause of liberty.” Since Thomson was the son of an evicted farmer in Ireland, P.J. Boylan reasoned that being the first to read aloud the Declaration of Independence must have been especially gratifying: “How the reading must have thrilled his soul!” The *Pilot* claimed that twelve of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence had been Irish, and Irishman Charles Carroll of Carrollton “was the first man to sign, the richest man that signed, the most useful to the cause of any that signed, and the last man to die of those that signed.” Nineteen American generals had been born in Ireland or to Irish parents, claimed the paper. The *Pilot* even used the infamous traitor Benedict Arnold to state their case for Irish participation in the war by quoting his 1801 letter that stated that

“as an American officer I was compelled to associate almost entirely with Irishmen,” and that the “Irish influence seemed to dominate Washington and the American cause.”<sup>41</sup>

George Creel also echoed these sentiments and stated that the Irish had been ensconced in the American Revolution. While Creel himself was not Irish, his book on the subject echoed many of the claims being made by Irish leaders. As the head of the Committee on Public Information, Creel was well-versed in the art of propaganda. Being exiled by the oppressive English had caused “their hearts” to be “filled with a passion for freedom that gave purpose and courage to the American complaint against British tyranny.” Creel listed ten Irish signers of the Declaration of Independence and several key players in the American Revolution, including John Sullivan, Maurice O’Brien, John Barry, and an extensive list of American generals with Irish heritage. More than one-third of the subscribers to the Bank of Pennsylvania were members of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, which counted George Washington as an honorary member. Count Arthur Dillon had sailed with 2300 Irish troops to the West Indies, capturing British bases and relieving the Americans of “a great danger, contributing no little to the ultimate success. Other prominent Irish Americans claimed that Irish support had actually tipped the scales in favor of ratifying the Constitution. According to James K. McGuire, the Irish emigrants of New York were the first to volunteer for the Revolution, and without the Irish, the U.S. Constitution would never have been ratified for New York never would have supported it. Irish support had assured ratification of the Constitution. New York

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<sup>41</sup> Issued by the Progressive League?” Folder 4 (printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Catholic Messenger*, May 22, 1919; Joseph O’Connell, March 24, 1912 speech, Joseph O’Connell Papers, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Burns Library, Boston College; P.J. Boylan, Address to Ladies’ Auxiliary AOH of Brooklyn, *Irish World*, April 7, 1917; *Pilot*, March 29, 1919. Charles Carroll of Carrollton was born in 1737 in Maryland to a wealthy father who, fearing what would become of his fortune were he to die, refused to marry Carrollton’s mother. Thus, despite his Catholic faith in Catholic Maryland, he was seen as an outsider and a bastard – see Scott McDermott, *Charles Carroll of Carrollton: Faithful Revolutionary* (New York: Scepter, 2002), 1.

had been a Loyalist hub that Jefferson distrusted, and when Washington moved his headquarters to New York in 1776, the Tory influences were so strong as to force him to rely “on intrepid Irish patriots for support.”<sup>42</sup>

Irish-American organizations sought to legitimize all these claims of Irish support for the American Revolution, however. Little could signify their success more than tabbing President William Howard Taft as the keynote speaker at the 175<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner of the CIS. In October 1911, CIS President Patrick O’Loughlin invited Taft to speak at the upcoming function. In the letter, he constantly touted Irish connections and contributions to the American Revolution. Perhaps it was no coincidence that St. Patrick’s Day was the anniversary of the British evacuation of Boston back in 1776, thus making it a day of two celebrations of which “we, as American citizens, are vitally interested.” O’Loughlin went on to tout the patriotism and Irish identification with Revolutionary principles, as well as the society’s suspension of meetings during the War itself so that its members could fight for the patriot cause. In fact, O’Loughlin noted, “Washington himself must have had in mind the patriotism of the Irish soldier when he signaled his recognition of Irish bravery by making “St. Patrick” the pass-word on the night of the seventeenth of March, 1776, when, with 4000 seamen and 1500 Royalist families, the British evacuated Boston.” Wright McCormack wrote of his desire to have Evacuation Day become an American holiday to commemorate the British evacuation of Boston on March 17, 1776. That night, Washington made St. Patrick the countersign for

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<sup>42</sup> George Creel, *Ireland’s Fight for Freedom* (New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 168-170; McGuire, *The King, The Kaiser, and Irish Freedom*, 232. A passionate Irish nationalist, McGuire (the former Syracuse Mayor) also published a book welcoming and encouraging German assistance in forging Irish freedom during the First World War – see James K. McGuire, *What could Germany do for Ireland?* (New York: Wolfe Tone, 1916). Shane Leslie called *The King, Kaiser, and Irish Freedom* “naively preposterous” and “typical of the whole attempt to distort Irish sentiment” – see Leslie, *The Irish Issue in Its American Aspect*, 180.

the entire Continental Army, and McCormack quoted him as saying two years later that he was a “lover of St. Patrick’s Day and must settle the affair by making all the army keep the day.” Staking an early Irish claim to the country, O’Loughlin reminded Taft that the Charitable Irish Society had been founded in 1737, “nearly forty years before the American Declaration of Independence.”<sup>43</sup>

Taft eventually accepted the invitation and spoke kindly about the American Irish and their embrace of American values. Taft remarked on the legacy of the CIS, which had dated back so far. He applauded the contributions of the Irish to the Revolution as well. Taft remarked about the contributions of the Irish to the composite American character and look. The “soft, pleasing brown or blue eyes” of the Irish could now be found in many an American girl, while they added tenderness, pugnacity, a spirit of good fellowship, and poetic imagination to the American spirit. Taft also praised their contribution to American war efforts. “In all our wars,” said the commander-in-chief, “Irish men have been to the front, in the Revolution, in the War of 1812, in the Mexican War, and in the Civil War. Their patriotic love for their adopted country made them soldiers in the army of the Union than whom there were no more daring, no more effective.”<sup>44</sup>

### **The Irish and American Revolutionary Symbolism**

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<sup>43</sup> Wright McCormack, “Want Evacuation Day Celebrated Nationally,” March 14, 1920, Folder 3 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, April-July 1920), Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS; CIS Patrick O’Loughlin to President William Howard Taft, October 6, 1911, Folder 24, Box 1, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>44</sup> William Howard Taft speech at the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, Folder 24, Box 1, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College. According to F.M. Carroll, many Irish Americans equated Taft’s attendance at the 1910 Irish Fellowship Club meeting in Chicago with full acceptance as American citizens – see Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, 17.

In addition to touting their contributions to American history, the American Irish also embraced the symbolic legacy of the American Revolution. For example, the names of local FOIF branches were adorned by the names of great American patriots. A 1919 FOIF circular outlined the rules for naming local branches by creating three classifications: pre-1169 Irish, post-1169 Irish, or an “American patriot of national repute.” The third category could include either “the founders of the Republic whose sympathies were with Ireland in her struggle for liberty” or those of Irish blood who had won “an immortal place in the hearts of true Americans.” The list included George Washington, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Montgomery, and John Barry, along with Civil War heroes like James Shields, Philip Sheridan, and Patrick Cleburne.<sup>45</sup>

In “What American Women can do to Help Ireland?” Katherine Hughes pointed out that “Chicago’s women-lovers of liberty” had evolved the Daughters of Martha Washington group into an associate society of the Friends of Irish Freedom, which had “adopted as their slogan that grateful tribute to Ireland by Park Custis, the son of Martha Washington: ‘Let the Shamrock of Ireland be entwined with the laurels of the American Revolution – Eternal gratitude to Irishmen!’” When the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR) named many of its branches after famous Americans, the *Irish Press* decried it as a warning for the English. “When the names of American heroes are chosen for our organizations, especially when they are the names of Revolutionary patriots, it should serve to make England remember,” warned the author, “that neither are Washington nor his associates forgotten, and the analogy between

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<sup>45</sup> FOIF Circular, 1919, Folder 1 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, December 1919-), Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

America's struggle and that of Ireland is fully appreciated by many thousands in the United States."<sup>46</sup>

FOIF would often use Revolutionary symbolism to announce speakers or meetings. For example, a December 1921 announcement of Daniel Cohalan's intention to speak was announced in the following way: "WE APPEAL TO ALL OUR FELLOW CITIZENS TO CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM THEY SHALL SERVE IN THE COUNCILS OF THE NATION – GEORGE WASHINGTON OR BENEDICT ARNOLD? LET THE FRIENDS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON MEET TOGETHER ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 7, 1921, AT LEXINGTON THEATRE."

The message was clear: either you were pro-America by virtue of being in George Washington's camp and supporting Irish independence, or you were a traitor for failing to support Irish independence and symbolically throwing your hat in with scoundrels like Benedict Arnold. When Irish-American Senator Thomas Walsh of Massachusetts, Senator Thomas P. Gore of Oklahoma, and Governor Calvin Coolidge spoke on the prospect of Irish freedom at the 183<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary CIS Dinner in 1920, an internal memo predicted that the words of these eloquent speakers would be heard 'round the world,

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<sup>46</sup> Katherine Hughes, "What American Women can do to Help Ireland?" Folder 11 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, undated), Box 22, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Irish Press*, March 19, 1921. Eamon de Valera handpicked several Irish Americans to found the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR) on November 16, 1920. It would serve as his counter to Devoy and Cohalan's FOIF. DeValera did so largely due to strained relations with the FOIF leaders after the Great War. At its high point in 1921, the organization boasted over seven hundred thousand members, with Edward L. Doheny (nephew of Young Irelander Michael Doheny) serving as president. The League fight and DeValera's resignation deflated the group, which by 1923 was comprised of DeValera supporters – see Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 9-11. This backfired when Doheny was implicated in the Teapot Dome scandal – see Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, 159.

similar to the way that “the shots at Lexington were heard round the world the ideas and speeches will unquestionably travel as far.”<sup>47</sup>

In order to emphasize their American patriotism, the Irish Race Convention of 1919 was scheduled so that it would start on Washington’s birthday. A letter from John Devoy to Eamon de Valera, Arthur Griffith, and Count George Noble Plunkett (a papal count whose son was executed in the Easter Rising and thus, a Sinn Fein figurehead) illustrates how central American Revolutionary symbolism was to the Irish movement in America. Pledging American support for Irish self-determination, Devoy referenced the recent Irish Race Convention, which had assembled five thousand delegates on the “birthday of George Washington, where the immortal Declaration of Independence was given to the world.” When the Irish Race Convention met in Philadelphia, the picture gracing the cover of the *Irish World* showed a man ringing a bell, with the caption “The Irish Liberty Bell at Philadelphia.” The Minneapolis Knights of Columbus honored the 184<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington’s birth in 1916 with a banquet, ball, and speeches by Daniel H. Grady, Reverend Michael O’Brien, and Edward G. Dunn. In Butte, the Ancient Order of the Hibernians began celebrating annual birthday parties in honor of George Washington in 1907. According to David M. Emmons, “they feted Washington as the father not only of the country but of that wise and durable guide to diplomatic conduct, no entangling alliances.” The Clan Na Gael National Office issued a directive in February 1914 to organize its branches into the American Continental League. Local branches from which the Irish were to collect signatures and lobby for strict American neutrality were to adorn names of conspicuously non-Irish American heroes, such as

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<sup>47</sup> All-American National Council Correspondence, 1921, Folder 5, Box 1, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; 183<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary Dinner memo, Folder March 13-31, 1920, Box 5, CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Nathan Hale, Andrew Jackson, and Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Irish and Their Roles in American History**

While the American Revolution remained the most popular event in American history for which the Irish to reference their American heritage, Irish-American leaders also injected the Irish into other sections of the American narrative. Irish leaders used other periods in American history to further establish the Irish presence and contributions to America. This was a further attempt to establish the long-standing Americanism of the Irish, even pre-dating the United States. The Irish had played a key role in building the country's infrastructure, taming the frontier, and winning the Civil War, claimed their leaders. In their mind, these contributions Americanized them and further entitled them to speak out on behalf of spreading their brand of Americanism across the pond to the Emerald Isle.

Irish leaders claimed that they helped settle and tame the colonies that they would eventually help free from England. An article by Mr. George O'Dwyer in *America* looked at all the Irish names in seventeenth-century New England towns like Salem and Ipswich to determine that the Irish were not johnnies-come-lately to America but rather

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<sup>48</sup> Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism*, 88-89; John Devoy to Eamon de Valera, Arthur Griffith, and Count Plunkett, undated, Folder 3 (John Devoy correspondence, 1879-1918), Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Irish World*, February 15, 1919; *Irish Standard*, February 26, 1916; David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 342. Founded in New York City in 1836, members of the AOH generally supported moderate Home Rulers (they were Parnellites) in Ireland, at least until the First World War. At that time, support for the Irish Parliamentary Party evaporated and members generally turned to more militant groups like FOIF – see Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 50-59. “The most significant and durable revolutionary organization in the history of Irish America,” a handful of Fenians (on both sides of the divided group) formed the Clan na Gael in 1867 in New York City. Numerous Irish-American organizations (most notably, the FOIF) grew out of the Clan na Gael, which had limited central organization – see Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 74-93.

they had played a major role in the settling of these towns. O'Dwyer's research "has helped dispel the illusion that men and women of our race are "strangers within the gate" – late comers who are enjoying the benefits of the work of another race," boasted the *Irish World*. In fact, many of these early immigrants had been taken and forcibly removed from their native home. In addition to those exiled under Oliver Cromwell, many Irish were kidnapped and enslaved in New England. For example, Philip Welch and William Downing filed a lawsuit against their owner, Samuel Symonds, in 1654 "alleging that they were taken from their beds at night in Ireland, brought to a seaport and compelled to go on board a vessel against their wills" by some young men who "made a practice of selling Irish youths and adults to captains of ships bound for America for the highest price they could get."<sup>49</sup>

The Irish had both willingly and unwillingly helped build America. The *Boston Courier-Citizen* printed an editorial that claimed "Everybody knows that the New England town was; and where it survives is, the best governed community in the world, [one] reflecting the thrifful [sic], self-reliant and foreseeing character of its pure-bred Anglo-Saxon population." In response to this, George Francis O'Dwyer asked whether the author had "perchance, done any researching in New England town histories?" O'Dwyer's imperious retort began in reference to the editor of the *Courier-Citizen*. O'Dwyer's research of family records throughout the New England area indicated that there had "never been" a pure Anglo-Saxon population in these New England towns. And "if they depended on the influxes of English blood, most of the settlements would have died in the first century of occupation!" Irish and Scotch peoples had "kept the

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<sup>49</sup> *Irish World*, May 11, 1918.

towns going until the Revolution, when fresh Irish influxes – mostly from the south of Ireland – gave the needed impetus to win from the over-confident British.”<sup>50</sup>

O’Dwyer also published on Irish pioneers in Maine. He emphasized not only the Irish contribution to taming the Kennebec River area in Maine but also the Irish contribution to winning the French and Indian War (high numbers of Irish surnames on the muster rolls). Additionally, he mentioned the role Irish settlers in Maine had in assisting the patriot forces during the Revolutionary War. In the Revolutionary War, O’Dwyer claimed that Irish ingenuity helped assure American victory. This included allowing the one thousand men under Benedict Arnold’s command near Fort Western and Fort Halifax in 1775 to use Irishman Captain James Howard’s estate, where Mrs. Howard and other women cared for the sick men. His son, Captain Samuel Howard, used his “native Irish intuition” in successfully keeping trade avenues open between Newfoundland and the West Indies.<sup>51</sup>

Irish Catholics argued that they were in fact the true progenitors of religious freedom in the American colonies and not the Puritans and Pilgrims that had largely and mistakenly been credited with being so. The Irish claimed that by virtue of their religion, they were more American than Americans with other religious backgrounds. And again, they pointed to American history to justify this assertion. By the early twentieth century, the Irish no longer pined for acceptance into the dominant American Yankee culture. They had made a conscious decision instead to pursue an identity of commitment to American values and culture. The militantly pro-American Knights of Columbus in

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<sup>50</sup> George Francis O’Dwyer to the editor of the *Boston Courier-Citizen* (undated), Letters Folder, Box 1, George Francis O’Dwyer Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>51</sup> George Francis O’Dwyer, “Captain James Howard, Colonel William Lithgow, Colonel Arthur Noble, and other Irish Pioneers of Maine,” *Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 19(1920): 71-88.

Worcester, Massachusetts provides a good example of this. They replaced the old St. Patrick's Day parades in Worcester with Columbus Day Parades, where they celebrated Columbus as the first Catholic in the Americas. Whereas the St. Patrick's Day parades had initially been designed to preserve ethnic pride and solidarity in a rapidly-Americanizing Irish population, the Columbus Day parades celebrated an American heritage. These Jingoistic Catholic Americans sought to prove that they were the most Catholic and the most American, and by celebrating Columbus, they were able to do so.<sup>52</sup>

In keeping with their repugnance for un-American aristocrats, the Irish labeled Puritans as just that: un-American aristocrats. Furthermore, they rejected the premise that Puritans had brought religious freedom to the American colonies; instead, they claimed that religious freedom had first been introduced by Irish Catholics. The Irish used their memory of the Revolutionary War to drive this point home. Thomas H. Maginniss contended that the majority of the descendants of the first settlers in New England, notably the Puritans and the Pilgrims, became the "landed aristocracy, and the majority of them were to be found among the Loyalists, who formed a considerable portion of the population of America (especially Massachusetts) during the Revolution." Yet the majority of the population, "throughout *all* the Colonies – those who were devoted to the patriot cause – were by no means English nor Anglo-Saxon," wrote Maginniss, who noted that "American love of liberty, our republican form of government, and our ideals of justice are directly opposed to the character of the so-called Anglo-Saxons, a fact that is evident to any one familiar with the history of that race, who has

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<sup>52</sup> Timothy J. Meagher, "“Why Should We Care for a Little Trouble or a Walk through the Mud”: St. Patrick's and Columbus Day Parades in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1845-1915," *New England Quarterly* 58, no. 1(March 1985): 21-23.

studied the history of the English people with any degree of analysis.”<sup>53</sup> The Puritans, Pilgrims, and Protestant Anglo-Saxons were not Americans; they had proved that during the Revolutionary War. Rather it was the Irish Catholics who truly bequeathed the legacy of freedom to posterity.

The American Irish wanted to crush the notion that the Pilgrims and Puritans, and not the Catholics, were responsible for American freedom of religion. Whereas those groups practiced religious freedom for themselves, Catholics in the American colonies had truly grasped the meaning of freedom of religion. The “Charter of Liberties and Privileges” granted to New York in 1683, provided for religious and political equality and liberty among the population. Written almost a century before the Declaration of Independence by New York Governor and Irishman Thomas Dongan, the document could have provided a foundation of liberty which would have rendered the American Revolution unnecessary. It was a stark contrast to the religious tyranny that the Puritan majority forced on the people of Massachusetts.<sup>54</sup>

A FOIF pamphlet entitled “Playing up the Puritan” claimed that “the true founders of religious liberty in what is now the United States were the Catholic settlers of Maryland.” Those Catholics extended acceptance to all other denominations, something the Puritans did not understand. In “A Neglected Chapter in American History,” the *Pilot* reported on the religious open-mindedness that Catholics in colonial Maryland showed to their compatriots. Catholics in Maryland were “more tolerant than their age,” as they showed toleration to those that had not showed it to them when many were driven out of Virginia. The *Tablet* also blasted the notion that the Pilgrims celebrated religious

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<sup>53</sup> Maginniss, *The Irish Contribution to America's Independence*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Maginnis, *The Irish Contribution to America's Independence*, 83-84.

freedom and toleration. In describing the true religious freedom found in colonial Maryland following the 1649 Toleration Act, the paper stated “History proves them [Pilgrims/Puritans] to have been what their descendants are in the year 1920, narrow, mean, contemptibly bigoted; above all else determined that no Catholic shall be honored if they can possibly prevent it.” Giving the Pilgrims credit for these most American of ideals was “on par with what happened in one of the English encyclopedias about George Washington” when it claimed that he was “born in England,” a FOIF pamphlet sarcastically opined. The *Monitor* also blasted President Wilson’s decision to proclaim December 21 Plymouth Rock Day on the grounds that the Pilgrims as “great lovers of civil and religious liberty and founders of democracy in the new world” was false. “History is the lie agreed upon,” stated the *Monitor*, “and a great deal of romance has been written around the Pilgrims and the Puritans.”<sup>55</sup> Irish Catholics needed to own their American history.

The *Tablet* called on Catholic schoolchildren to rectify this situation by paying special attention their American history studies. In this plea, the author explained that all those living in America needed to become more ardent Americans and the study of history was a great way to do so. The study of American history would be particularly beneficial to Catholic schoolchildren because of the Catholic contributions to American History. “The children of our Catholic schools are in reality attending strictly American schools” because “the land is full of Catholic memories,” said the *Tablet*. After all, “It was Catholic daring that opened up our soil to European explorers. It was Catholic love

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<sup>55</sup> Playing Up the Puritan,” Folder 4, (National Secretary, printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Pilot*, June 12, 1920; *Tablet*, November 27, 1920, Brackets added; “The Anglo-Saxon Humbug,” Folder 4, (National Secretary, printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Monitor*, August 7, 1920.

of liberty that wrote into our Declaration of Independence its note of universal freedom. It was Catholic blood that did not hesitate to be shed in the bitter hours of war, and it was Catholic loyalty to President that brought to pass so much peace and prosperity in America in times of quiet. Catholics have ever shown the utmost love for America.” Since Catholics had such an affinity with American history, “Why then should not our children in the American Catholic schools be fervently interested in studying American History? For May this subject will be the most important subject in our course of study. To it we shall give time and attention. It will make us better Americans and better Catholics. Study American History.”<sup>56</sup>

The Irish also claimed that their Catholic religion had molded the American experience, both directly and indirectly. In addition to their previous service and future military commitment to the American people, the Irish had also contributed to the betterment of the American character. The American Irish had improved the level of American wit and humor, stood opposed to the evils of divorce, and had been stalwart opponents of the “ethics of the barn-yard and the stable,” or birth control, and had been opposed to anarchy and social disorder. At the Indiana Knights of Columbus state convention in 1916, Quin O’Brien of Chicago delivered an address arguing that the Catholic Church had influenced the American Republic to such an extent, and Catholics had contributed so much to the American soul, that nothing could be more anti-American and un-American than anti-Catholic bigotry. Attacking the notion that the Catholic Church in America was a foreign entity, O’Brien stressed that “Ours is the Church Universal. It is neither foreign nor hostile to any government or country. America is the

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<sup>56</sup> *Tablet*, April 23, 1921.

Child of the Catholic Church, and not its stepchild. Our Church furnished the inspiration, the men and the means whereby America was discovered, explored and colonized.”<sup>57</sup>

Catholics had always maintained a special bond with Americans, according to O’Brien, who traced their contributions back to the original American explorers. He claimed that the Catholic monk Roger Bacon “first set forth” the existence of the New World, and Catholic Cardinal D’Ailly first confirmed it in his writings. Columbus formulated many of his plans in the Catholic convent of La Rabida, and he named the “Santa Maria” after the Blessed Virgin Mary. “Christopher” itself meant “Christ bearer.” When Columbus “first laid foot on American soil, he had on his breast a cross especially blessed by the Church,” and his ship bore a Papal flag. He named the new land San Salvador, or “Holy Savior,” and he dedicated it to Christ’s glory. America itself was named after a Catholic, and Catholics like Marquette, Joliet, and La Salle deserve much credit for its initial exploration.<sup>58</sup>

The Irish claimed an American legacy that long preceded any thoughts of an independent American republic. Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet claimed that Irish astronomers such as Fearghal had correctly mapped the solar system five centuries before Copernicus and Galileo, and as a result, “for centuries the Irish had a more accurate geographical knowledge of the earth than was possessed by any other people of the period.” The United States Catholic Historical Society claimed in 1892 that Irishman William Ires (along with an Englishman named Tallarte de Lajes) was one of two non-Spanish explorers on Columbus’s crew. Edward O’Meagher Condon claimed that the first crew member to set foot on San Salvador was actually an Irishman. Renowned Irish

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<sup>57</sup> William T.A. Fitzgerald speech, “The Day We Celebrate,” Box 4 (Social Papers, 1915-1919, March 16-31, 1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; *Irish Standard*, February 26, 1916.

<sup>58</sup> *Michigan Catholic*, May 18, 1916.

mariner Patrick Maguire (his name put in Spanish guise on the muster rolls) actually assisted Columbus, claimed Dr. Emmet, and he was the first to reach shore upon the landing in America. The Irish also claimed that Columbus was inspired by the transatlantic voyages of St. Brendan, which dated to the mid-sixth century. The Irish had discovered America by at least the eighth century, and according to Reverend William Stang, D.D., “The Irish not only penetrated the inhospitable and uncultivated parts of the Continent, we find them on the shores of America as early as the eighth century.” In fact, when Norse navigator Gndlief Gndlaugan landed there in the early eleventh century, he found “the people speaking Irish, and in the Sagas the country is called “Ireland-it-Mikla,” that is, Great Ireland.” Edward O’Meagher Condon claimed that St. Brendan had set sail in 545, launching an expedition to explore the American interior upon landing in present-day Virginia. Brendan preached for seven years in the American hinterland, reaching the Ohio River before returning to Ireland. After embarking on a return voyage, Brendan was never heard from again. In Condon’s estimation, the conflict between the Britons and the Saxon invaders prevented Ireland from establishing permanent communication with their American discoveries.<sup>59</sup>

Douglass O’Malley, a partner of Columbus, was quoted as saying that several Irishmen accompanied Columbus on his journey to discover America. Of St. Brendan’s voyages, “Columbus knew about it; had read of it; had heard it talked of and discussed among seafaring people, and to him it was more than a merely poetic legend composed of airy nothing,” reasoned the paper. Various Irish speakers claimed that America had first been known as “Great Ireland” because the Irish had actually been to the New World

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<sup>59</sup> *Irish World*, October 12, 1918; Edward O’Meagher Condon, *The Irish Race in America* (New York: Ford’s National Library, 1887), 3-8. Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet was the brother of Irish revolutionary and martyr Robert Emmet.

long before Columbus's time. Some claimed that St. Brendan had reached American shores during the sixth century. Others cited evidence such as Irish crosiers, bells, and books existing in Iceland five hundred years before the arrival of Norsemen. In her book *Explorers in the New World: before and after Columbus*, Marion Mulhall asserted that people in Florida were speaking an Irish language as far back as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In a March 1919 sermon in which he alluded to St. Brendan's daring trip, Reverend Peter Guilday said "A thousand years before the great Discoverer sailed from out the port of Palos to open the way across the seas to the New World, a little band of Irishmen – priests and mariners – led by St. Brendan, Bishop of Clonfert, had voyaged across the Shan Arragh, as the Atlantic was called, and had reached the shores of this new land. No one has ever been able to fully discredit this famous voyage, and it has been one of the best beloved legends of the world ever since." The *Catholic Citizen* also told the story of St. Brendan, who sailed to the Americas and island-hopped for seven years before returning to Ireland with his monks. St. Brendan found, among other things, the "paradise once tenanted by Adam and Eve." This legend formed one of the causes which led to the Columbus's famous discoveries.<sup>60</sup> Not only was a Catholic credited with "discovering" America, but an Irish Catholic saint had actually been responsible for paving the way for him. It would be difficult to stake out an earlier, more concrete claim to Americanism than that.

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<sup>60</sup> *Irish World*, October 12, 1918; 1906 newspaper clipping, 1909 newspaper clipping, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Joseph O'Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College; Reverend Peter Guilday sermon, March 23, 1919, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Harrisburg, PA, printed in the *Irish World*, March 29, 1919; *Catholic Citizen*, August 26, 1916. Most serious scholars agree that the legend of St. Brendan's voyage was, in fact, just a legend or allegory. Very little (in the way of concrete facts) is known of his life. For a concise discussion of his supposed adventures, see Gearoid O. Donnchadha, *St. Brendan of Kerry, the Navigator: His Life and Voyages* (Dublin: Open Air at Four Courts Press, 2004).

Irish leaders also frequently discussed the Irish energy expended in building the American infrastructure and tied it back to their American patriotism and heritage. The Irish were chief “among the pathfinders and builders of the American nation,” according to P.J. Boylan and the *Irish World*. According to United States Naval Chaplain Daniel R. Burns in a speech to the CIS, there was no “better, squarer, more patriotic and more loyal race than the Irish.” They had performed admirably during the Great War’s trench warfare in no small part because for generations, “they have come over here and gone into the ditches – I guess that is why they did such good work in the trenches, their fathers were used to the trenches.”<sup>61</sup>

The Irish had played a special part in modernizing the country as well. Dr. McAleer claimed that steamship inventor Robert Fulton was the son of an Irishman from Kilkenny, and Christopher Colles of Cork was the originator of the Erie Canal, one of “the greatest, most important and daring works of internal improvement.” FOIF flyers affirmed the pride in Irishmen Robert Fulton and Christopher Colles and bragged about other Irish contributions to the making of modern America. Irish-American Governor DeWitt Clinton (a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, although this was left out of the report) deserved the credit for implementing Colles’ Erie Canal plan. Irishman Henry O’Reilly built the first telegraph line, and the Irish showed their progressivism by making Irishwoman Mary Healy the first female schoolteacher in New England (possibly all of America). The FOIF flyer concluded that “in every crisis as well as every forward

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<sup>61</sup> P.J. Boylan, Address to Ladies’ Auxiliary AOH of Brooklyn, *Irish World*, April 7, 1917; Daniel R. Burns, Address to CIS, May 19, 1919, Folder May-June 1919, Box 9 (Business Papers, 1917-1922), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

movement in the history of America, Irishmen and the descendants of Irishman, have always taken a prominent part.”<sup>62</sup>

Thomas H. Maginnis claimed that typical school histories only mentioned the Famine Irish, but the Irish had contributed so much more to America in the years preceding the arrival of the mid-nineteenth century Irish. Irish Americans had been progressive, inventive, religious, educational, and philanthropic, claimed Maginnis. They were everything that the Irish claimed America was and Britain was not. The first daily newspaper in America, called the *Pennsylvania Packet*, had been edited by John Dunlap of Philadelphia (born in Strabane, County Tyrone). The first American writer on political economy was Matthew Carey (born in Armagh, Ireland in 1761). Maginnis also referenced Irishman and Erie Canal architect Christopher Colles (born in Ireland in 1738) who built the first American steam engine. Robert Fulton’s father had come from Kilkenny, Ireland. The first grain-cutter had been invented by Robert McCormick, and the first practical reaper had been manufactured by Cyrus Hall McCormick, whose reaping machine “contributed an annual income to the whole country of \$55,000,000 at least.” The first cut nails came from James Cochran (whose father hailed from Coleraine, Ireland). Patrick Tracey Jackson and Francis C. Howell had first introduced cotton manufacturing to the colonies, and the first New England linen industry was done by the Irish colonists of 1718. Thomas Crehore had manufactured the first piano in the United States, and John Hannon created the first American chocolate.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Catholic Messenger*, May 22, 1919; “Issued by the Progressive League?” Folder 4 (printed letters and circulars, 1916-1926), Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS. Claiming the Clintons was yet another disingenuous were Presbyterians who left northern Ireland and settled in the Presbyterian Scotch-Irish bastion of Philadelphia in October 1729; it was DeWitt’s grandfather Charles Clinton and his wife Elizabeth (and his two sisters, their families, and additional friends) that made the voyage – see Dorothie Bobbe, *DeWitt Clinton* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1933), 3-7.

<sup>63</sup> Maginnis, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence*, 80-82.

The Irish highlighted many of their educational, religious, and philanthropic achievements. Asa Mahon was the first president of Oberlin College, which was the first college in the world to admit women on open terms and accepted black students twenty-eight years before emancipation. The first institution of higher learning sanctioned by the Presbyterian Church was the “Log College” of Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, founded by Irishman Gilbert Tennant. This college was regarded as the “germ from which sprang Princeton College and several lesser institutions of learning.” Irishman James MacGreggor founded the first Presbyterian Church in New England, and his countryman Patrick Allison did so in Baltimore. James O’Kelly founded the first Republican Methodist Church in North Carolina and Virginia, while William McKendree founded the First Methodist Episcopal Church in America. John Carroll, the grandson of a native-born Irishman, was the first Roman Catholic Bishop of America. Irish-American John McDonough left his \$2 million fortune to fund free schools in New Orleans and Baltimore, and John O’Fallon, who founded the O’Fallon Polytechnic Institute and gave generously to Washington University, built a dispensary and medical college, and gave away over \$1 million in St. Louis, was the son of the Irishman Dr. James O’Fallon, who served in the Revolutionary War.<sup>64</sup>

The Irish had also settled American frontier lands like Kentucky and had not been properly credited for this in popular American folklore. The *Gaelic American* printed an article in January 1917 on the history of Irish pioneers in Kentucky, which pronounced that “it was not Daniel Boone, as has so long been accepted, but a man who bore the good Gaelic name of John McBride, who first explored Kentucky and made known its existence to the world.” Irishman John Finley commanded the second exploration of

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<sup>64</sup> Maginniss, *The Irish Contribution to America’s Independence*, 80-82.

Kentucky, and it was Finley's stories and experiences which helped pave the way for Daniel Boone's more famous expedition, "just as it was the stories and legends of St. Brendan's discovery of a new continent that served as an incentive to Columbus and gave him courage and hope to pursue his explorations against all discouragement." Furthermore, Daniel Boone had "received his education from an Irish schoolmaster, probably the first man of his calling who ever appeared in that part of the country."<sup>65</sup>

According to Michael J. O'Brien, Irish-born and Maynooth College-educated Peter McClouth, whose five sons all fought in the Revolutionary War, taught at a grammar school in Massachusetts where he had John Hancock as a pupil. Irish veterans of the Revolutionary War had been the first to settle both Madison County (Captain James Cassity and his son, Colonel Thomas Cassity, who rebelled against the British Army and joined the patriots after the outbreak of the war) and Oswego County (Dennis McCarthy and Matthew Whalen, identified in legal records as "soldiers of the revolution") in New York, and Captain Edward O'Connor, "a Revolutionary soldier, an Irishman of good education" became the first schoolmaster in Onondaga County, New York.<sup>66</sup>

The Irish also claimed to have settled the western frontier and to have included several key contributors to American law and medicine. Captain John J. Healy was the commercial discoverer of Alaska, and four of the sixteen white men in its largest settlement were found to be *Irish World* subscribers. General Patrick E. Connor in Utah, along with Sam Houston and Phillip Nolan in Texas, were key Irish-American pioneers.

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<sup>65</sup> *Gaelic American*, January 6, 1917.

<sup>66</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, "Some Stray Historical Tidbits of the American Revolution," 122-124. If O'Brien was referring to St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, this claim would constitute an anachronism. That institution was not founded until 1795.

“Irishmen who made important discoveries in the Wild West, amassed fortunes and aided in the development of the country” included Henry W. Oliver, John W. Mackey, Marcus Daly, James C. Flood, James G. Fair, William S. O’Brien, “all of whom began at the lowest rung of the ladder.” Notable Irish doctors included the Mayo brothers of Rochester, Minnesota, and “among eminent jurists we can claim Judge Taney, whose real name was Tierney.”<sup>67</sup>

The *San Francisco Monitor* gave credit to the Irish for helping to settle the American frontier, as well as an additional wide array of notable American ingenuity. It heaped praise on Robert Fulton for his steam engine, Irishman Patrick Jackson whose “inventive genius gave New England its cotton industry,” and Irish engineer Jasper O’Farrell, who planned the city of San Francisco. Irishman James Hoban designed the White House, and Irishmen had constituted a great percentage of America’s best newspapermen, most notably Horace Greeley. Even the best doctors in the land were Irish: “from the great Murphy of Chicago to the best physicians in our own State, the list is little else than a catalogue of Macs and O’s!” Nearly half the American presidents had Irish heritage.<sup>68</sup>

According to Dr. McAleer in the *Catholic Messenger*, the Irish had come to America’s aid long before the American Revolution. The first grave of a white man in what eventually became New York had been that of Irishman John Colson, who died in Hudson’s expedition of 1609. The first settlement in the Shenandoah in what became Maine was made by the Kelley and Haley families of Galway County in 1653. Irish immigrants from Carrickfergus, Ireland were the first to settle the Merrimac River in Massachusetts

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<sup>67</sup> P.J. Boylan, Address to Ladies’ Auxiliary AOH of Brooklyn, *Irish World*, April 7, 1917.

<sup>68</sup> *San Francisco Monitor*, July 3, 1915. It goes on and on with this list of Irish-American contributions.

in 1637, and John Lewis of County Donegal first settled the Shenandoah, birthplace of President Wilson. When King Philip's War broke out in 1675, it had been Ireland and not England that sent a large enough donation aboard the ship the "Katherine" that 500 towns and settlements (and 3600 people) were succored, many of them probably saved from starvation.<sup>69</sup>

The Irish claimed that they had been active in defense of the country whenever the country needed assistance. In a 1916 speech to the CIS, the Honorable William T.A. Fitzgerald pointed out that all Americans should celebrate Washington's victory on St. Patrick's Day 1776, that Meagher, Sheridan, and Colonel Cass had helped keep the Union intact, and that Irish Americans had more than filled their quotas in the most recent conflict, the Spanish-American War. Fitzgerald gave special attention to Andrew Jackson, the hero of New Orleans, who Fitzgerald mentioned "once said he was almost a native Irishman, because he was born in North Carolina less than two years after his parents emigrated from Carrickfergus." George Creel claimed that one-fourth of the officers in Jackson's Army were Irish (as was Jackson) and pointed out that 170,000 Irish fought in Lincoln's Army too. He even credited the "so-called Irish-Americans" with setting aside their hatred of England and waived their draft exemption status for the American war effort in World War I at a greater rate than any other immigrant group. "There is no department of American endeavor – profession, trade, or calling," wrote Creel, "that Gaels have not entered and enriched, and when, out of ancient devotions that

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<sup>69</sup> *Catholic Messenger*, May 22, 1919.

must ever remain dear to decent hearts, they ask that pledged principles of justice be applied to Ireland, America will find it difficult indeed to refuse.”<sup>70</sup>

The Irish touted their supposed staunch Unionism and the bravery of the Irish Brigade during the American Civil War. Certain Civil War memoirs released between the two periods helped solidify the Irish-American (and mainstream American) memory of the war. A selective amnesia developed in Irish-American circles regarding certain less patriotic events and trends as they related to the Irish experience in the North during the Civil War. The Irish claimed to carry forth Lincoln’s idealistic vision of world freedom and repeatedly boasted of their commitment to the Union at its most perilous hour. The New York City draft riots and the militant Copperheadism of many Irish during the Civil War were conveniently forgotten as the Irish expounded upon their staunch Unionism in times of crisis. In fact, the *Citizen* (Chicago) claimed that the Protestant Orangemen had all been secessionists during the Civil War, while “the Irish Catholic peasantry who flocked to the United States after the great famine...fought almost to the man for the Union.”<sup>71</sup>

The Charitable Irish Society was fond of recalling and repeating its more patriotic quotes in support of the Union. “When the perpetuity of the Union was at stake, members of this society were prompt to defend, with their fortunes and their lives, the integrity of the Union, as will be shown by the following extract from the Records,” read

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<sup>70</sup> William T.A. Fitzgerald speech, “The Day We Celebrate,” Box 4 (Social Papers, 1915-1919, March 16-31, 1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Creel, *Ireland’s Fight for Freedom*, 171-174. According to Michael J. O’Brien, both Stonewall Jackson and George B. McClellan had ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War. Hugh McClellan, whose father Michael emigrated from Ireland to Colerain, Massachusetts in 1749, served under General Gates and was promoted to Colonel of his regiment. Stonewall Jackson’s great grandfather, John Jackson, had emigrated from Ireland to Maryland in 1748. He and his two sons George and Edward all fought for the patriots, with the two younger Jacksons being commissioned as officers – see O’Brien, “Some Stray Historical Tidbits,” 122, 126.

<sup>71</sup> *Citizen*, October 4, 1918.

a CIS flyer written in the immediate aftermath of Southern secession. Taking the opportunity to point out that the CIS was older than both the Confederacy and even the Constitution itself, it claimed a special connection with the integrity of the Union. “That the Charitable Irish Society of Boston condemns and abhors every principle or movement that would dissever these United States,” read a CIS resolution from the Civil War era, “we now solemnly renew our vows of fealty and love for the Union and the Constitution, and emulating the example and glorious achievements of our predecessors of ’76 and ’89, we pledge our efforts and our influence for the vindication and maintenance, ‘pure and undefiled,’ of this most perfect form of civil and religious liberty.”<sup>72</sup>

Their memory of Irish-American Civil War Unionism complemented their memory of Irish service in the Revolutionary War that had earned the Irish a blessed form of Americanism. In the booklet which included the official itinerary for the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner for the Charitable Irish Society, a poem by Denis A. McCarthy lauded Irish efforts during the Civil War. “And when the fiery-hearted South; Her wayward course would take... Your brethren went forth to face the danger rushing on, And even in a foremost place, The banner of their ancient race, Above the battle shone!” McCarthy went on, “While still loyal to memories old, Their green flag with its harp of gold, Beside Old Glory shone!” The poem finished “Thus, thus, O Irish-blooded band, When war flags were unfurled, The love you bear to this dear land, You proved to all the world!”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> 1889 Annual Ball of the Charitable Irish Society flyer, Folder 1, Box 1, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>73</sup> Denis A. McCarthy poem, 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner program (1912), Folder 24, Box 1, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

At the same Dinner, Richard Lane also mentioned Irish service to the Union during the American Civil War. Lane quoted the secretary from fifty years earlier, who had noted that “many of our members have gone to the war to fight for the restoration of the glorious Constitution and union of the states.” He went on to add that many had “already attained a position in the army of the Union which has redounded to the honor of their nationality.” Lane heaped praise on the Irish race for all they had done in America, including those who had “opened the mines and built the railroads of our country and did such notable work in the structural upbuilding of the United States.” Additionally, Lane mentioned that seven American presidents had “Irish blood in their veins.”<sup>74</sup> The Irish were mainstream America, and had been so all along.

President Taft echoed the sentiments of other speakers at the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner in 1912. He gave the Irish credit for their service in all American wars and asserted that “there were no more daring, no more effective” troops during the Civil War than the Irish. Whereas they had once been considered foreigners, Taft felt that they “had so identified themselves with the American in politics, in the wars, in the business and prosperity of the country, that all distinctions have vanished.”<sup>75</sup> Massachusetts Governor David I. Walsh (future U.S. Senator from Massachusetts) spoke at the 178<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the CIS in 1915 and paid tribute to the Massachusetts Irish by toasting their contributions to the Union victory in the Civil War. Governor Walsh quoted a circular extolling the Irish for their virtue and honor during the war. Walsh quoted this “tribute of Massachusetts when it needed and wanted the sons of the Irish race to preserve and

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Lane, speech at 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, March 18, 1912, Folder 4, Box 3 (Social Papers, 1912-1914), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>75</sup> President William Howard Taft, 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner speech, March 18, 1912, Folder 4, Box 3 (Social Papers, 1912-1914), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

perpetuate the American republic” in saying that when “a host of Southern traitors seek to destroy our free democratic government,” the Irish had been there more than any other group. In the subsequent fifty years, nothing had changed.<sup>76</sup>

Irish women had also done their part in earning Americanism. The *Boston Pilot* reported on the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians and their service to the nation as Civil War nurses, or “Angels of the Battlefield.” The American Irish took it upon themselves to highlight their own history, for it was readily apparent that no one else would. “If we will not do it we cannot expect others to do it for us. Some one has well said that if the nursing Sisters of the War had not been Catholics they would have had a national monument erected to their glory long before this. And many a book would have been written to show that glory.” In concert with the Catholic War Veterans Memorial Legion, the Ladies Auxiliary of the AOH organized a “series of lectures and moving picture entertainments showing the services of Catholic chaplains and Sisters during the Civil War.”<sup>77</sup>

Conveniently forgetting that the Irish constituted one of the most adamantly anti-Lincoln constituencies in the north, the Irish claimed to be heirs to Abraham Lincoln’s vision for world freedom. They wanted to apply this freedom to Ireland. Upon American entry into the First World War, Congressman William Bourke Cockran delivered a speech on “America in Arms” in Rochester, New York, in which he vowed that the American war effort was primarily aimed at extending “over the whole world the justice which Abraham Lincoln enthroned throughout the United States. The issue is the same, the theatre broadened,” he explained. To those who accused the United States of

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<sup>76</sup> Massachusetts Governor David I. Walsh, 178<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, March 17, 1915, Folder March 1915, Box 8 (Business Papers, 1913-1916), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>77</sup> *Pilot*, July 25, 1914.

rallying to war only for its own materialistic reasons, Cockran stated that only in the Mexican-American War, a war forced on a reluctant populace, did the U.S. fight for selfish reasons. In all other wars, as in the First World War, America fought “for justice to the humblest, the poorest, the weakest, the most despised of the whole human family.” The Irish claimed their inspiration came from Lincoln and his vision of freedom extended worldwide. Applying the principles espoused in the Gettysburg Address directly to the Irish issue, the front page of the *Irish World* for February 8, 1919 pictured Lincoln next to a man tagged as “Ireland,” who held a sign stating “Government of the Irish people, by the Irish people, and for the Irish people.” The caption read “Ireland’s Inspiration from England.”<sup>78</sup>

The *Irish World* ran a story on British Ambassador Sir Auckland Geddes “Insulting the Memory of Lincoln,” in which Geddes is quoted in a speech to a group of American lawyers as saying that most Europeans at best “vaguely” believed in the principles encapsulated by Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. “It is to be regretted that some one of them had not the moral courage to rise up and tell Geddes that he was offering an insult to the memory of Abraham Lincoln by quoting from the Gettysburg speech,” said the *Irish World*, which was ironic “at the very time the government Geddes officially represents is trampling under foot the identical principles which Abraham Lincoln predicted ‘shall not perish from the earth.’” The paper continued, “It would have been a fitting and timely rebuke to the official representative of a country that is making every effort to secure American approval of the greatest crime against liberty committed since

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<sup>78</sup> William Bourke Cockran speech, “America in Arms,” Rochester, NY, 1917, Folder 6, Box 28, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL; *Irish World*, February 8, 1919.

Russian Czardom sank into the abyss in which the British Empire is destined to disappear with all its crimes against Justice and Humanity.”<sup>79</sup>

In celebrating Lincoln’s birthday, papers like the *Irish World* claimed that they were celebrating “the great American who was so instrumental in preserving the work begun by Washington and his compatriots. It is fortunate we have in Abraham Lincoln so high a type of real Americanism.” The *Tablet* implored the country to “give us another Lincoln” in February 1920. To the *Tablet*, Lincoln was “the American of Americans.”<sup>80</sup>

The American Irish used popular figures like Lincoln to bolster their own American credentials. To the outsider, it appeared very American to frame these arguments by using these American heroes, even in making the case for the freedom of a “foreign” country. Catholic countries such as France and Spain had come to America’s defense in the Revolutionary War. Even Abraham Lincoln’s first teacher had been a Catholic priest, Zachariah Riney. Furthermore, more than double their proportion in the Northern population did Catholics join Lincoln’s army. Abraham Lincoln’s stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnson Lincoln, was a Catholic, reported the *Irish Standard*. “Under her motherly tutelage,” according to the paper, “the young man developed the sturdy virtues of that patience which hath a perfect work, his tireless industry, and an abiding sense of the nearness of a loving God.” Those who claimed Lincoln’s stepmother was a Catholic may have confused her with one of Lincoln’s aunts. Lincoln’s Catholic aunt also had a son named Abraham, which may have contributed to this misunderstanding, or it could have been an attempt to Americanize the American Catholic Church (which was still

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<sup>79</sup> *Irish World*, September 4, 1920.

<sup>80</sup> *Irish World*, February 9, 1918; *Tablet*, February 7, 1920; February 12, 1921.

overwhelmingly associated with immigrants at the time when these myths were most prevalent).<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusion

The Irish claimed that they had played *the* critical role in winning the Revolutionary War. This burnished their American credentials and gave them the moral high ground from which to attack the Wilson Administration's foreign policies. Irish Catholics had been intricately involved in the discovery, settling, and founding of America. Irish-American clubs and periodicals emphasized these contributions as a way of legitimizing themselves during an era marked by nativism and One Hundred Percent Americanization campaigns. Once they had established themselves as so deeply ingrained into the American narrative, they could then use their memory of the American Revolution to make the case for Ireland's freedom.

They made this case by equating the situation in Ireland in the early 1920s with the American colonies in 1776. They contended that the war against England needed to be fought again in 1920. True Americans would support the Irish independence movement, as it was the latest front in the struggle for world freedom. They deified the Founding Fathers, especially Washington, and they exalted the motivations behind the American Revolution. The Irish attacked anyone who questioned the patriotic motives of the Founding Fathers or their hyperbolic claims regarding the presence of the Irish in the Continental Army. They identified a pro-British conspiracy that sought to marginalize

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<sup>81</sup> *Michigan Catholic*, May 18, 1916; *Irish Standard*, February 26, 1916; Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Holt, 2004), 109.

the historical significance of the American Revolution and to win Irish freedom, they had to win the fight over the memory of the American Revolution.

## **CHAPTER VII – AN “UNDERHAND ATTEMPT AT ANGLICIZING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICANS”: THE IRISH FIGHT TO PRESERVE THEIR HISTORICAL MEMORY**

### **Introduction**

“There are many who boast of their Americanism, their love of America’s history, her traditions and her institutions, who yet deny to Ireland the right to follow America’s example,” pronounced Thomas J. Mahony at the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick quarterly meeting in New York City on May 2, 1921. “The great trouble,” he explained, “is that such people forget the history of the American Revolution, if they ever knew it.” The way to fix that trouble was to compare the nature and ideology of both Revolutions. As Mahony saw it, “one who endorses the American Revolution, to be consistent, must necessarily endorse the Irish Revolution.” In the aftermath of World War I, Ireland was engaged in a struggle for its independence against the British government. Irish-American leaders used their interpretation of U.S. history to make the case for full Irish freedom. They proclaimed that Ireland was undergoing a new American Revolution, and they pointed to perceived similarities between the two events. In reneging on his promise of national self-determination for Ireland and subordinating Irish freedom to his own political expediency, the president had essentially renounced the meaning of 1776.<sup>1</sup>

The Irish had spent much of the Great War period bragging about their supposed contributions to the founding of the American nation. After the war was over, the debate over Irish autonomy raged in the British Isles. The Irish used their contributions during the American Revolution to make the case for the complete freedom of Ireland. They

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas H. Mahony, “Similarities Between the American and Irish Revolutions,” address at the quarterly meeting of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, New York, May 2, 1921, quote on pg. 5, 16-18; <http://www.archive.org/stream/similaritiesbetw00maho#page/n3/mode/2up>.

equated the two peoples and revolutions, arguing that Ireland in the early 1920s was fighting the same battle that they had fought for American freedom in 1776. This expanded into a war of words over the significance and meaning of the American Revolution and its most famous leaders. The Irish had not only used their supposed contributions to the American Revolution to argue for their own Americanism (Chapter 6), but they also applied their version of what 1776 meant to Ireland. Whereas the previous chapter showcased Irish claims of contributions to the American Revolution, this chapter will illustrate how they used their memory of these contributions and the legacy of the American Revolution itself on behalf of Irish independence.

### **Revolutionary Parallels**

Irish-American leaders deified the Founding Fathers and over-emphasized the level of anti-English sentiment in the American colonies in 1776. They purified the motives and records of Revolutionary Americans. They launched a full-out assault on anyone who dared suggest that full independence from Britain did not have near-unanimous support in the colonies or anyone who questioned the dogmatic purity and rightness of the patriot cause. They blasted anyone who questioned their contention of the overwhelming Irish presence that had won the war for the Americans; they accused the naysayers of advancing British propaganda or even being British spies. They attacked the authors of many major school textbooks that did not share their memory and interpretation of the American Revolution as the seminal and overarching event in U.S. history. The Irish accused the authors of these textbooks of being un-American purveyors of British propaganda.

These Irish-American leaders treated this fight over the legacy of the American Revolution as a front in the war for Irish freedom. The American Irish drew direct parallels between the American situation in 1776 and the Irish situation during the First World War era. Both fought the same enemy and both needed a catalyst to fashion victory. As the Irish had come to rescue the Americans in 1776, Irish-American leaders called upon the United States to rescue the Irish and build an Irish republic on the American model. Irish-American leaders used the words of the Founding Fathers to make this case for them, and they framed it as a purely American issue. By doing so, they intended to spread the American Revolution to their beloved Ireland.

Since the American Irish used their memory of the American Revolution to make their case for Ireland, that memory remained critical throughout the era to their plight. When that memory underwent a perceived attack, Irish-American leaders lashed out against what they called pro-British and anti-American textbooks, historians, and politicians. By sabotaging the meaning of and Irish contribution to American history (especially the American Revolution), these foreign elements not only called into question the Americanism of a Catholic ethnic group during a nativist era but also endangered the American public's perception of Ireland's fight for its own freedom. At stake was not only their memory and interpretation of American history but also the freedom of Ireland, which is why these supposed British propagandists constituted such a significant threat.

According to John Patrick Buckley and William V. Shannon, many Irish Americans associated American history with Irish freedom. This group, which included Devoy, Cohalan, Jeremiah O'Leary, and the Ford family (who published the *Irish World*)

all wanted a free Ireland styled entirely on the American Republic. They wanted an Irish Declaration of Independence, an Irish George Washington, and an Irish Constitution, modeled on the American one. In each situation, the scrappy underdogs faced an uphill battle against the entrenched evil overlord, Great Britain. They each fought for national self-determination and freedom against the aristocratic, un-American Britain. In 1776, the Irish had saved the American colonies, and now it was time to repay that debt. As the Honorable Medill McCormick said at the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Dinner in 1920 “We are Americans whether our forebears took up arms against George III or renounced allegiance to George IV.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the American patriots who rebelled in 1776 and their Irish counterparts who renounced George IV after the 1801 Act of Union were all Americans.

The Irish used the American Revolution first to claim their American heritage and then to paint a clear analogy between the American colonies in 1776 and Ireland in the era of the First World War. In doing so, their call to Americanize the situation in Ireland would hold special appeal to Americans of all creeds and colors. As T.P. O’Connor said in his 1918 St. Patrick’s Day Annual banquet of the IFC, “We decline to isolate and

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<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Buckley, *The New York Irish*, 6; Shannon, *The American Irish*, 133; Medill McCormick, 1920 Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Dinner, Folder 4, Box 29, William Bourke Cockran Papers, NYPL. Born in Galway in 1837, Patrick Ford emigrated to the United States with his parents in 1846. He enlisted in the Massachusetts Irish Ninth and participated in the failed Union charge at Fredericksburg. After the war, he lived for four years in Charleston before moving to New York and founding the *Irish World* in 1870, which served the cause of Irish freedom even past his 1913 death. He participated in the Land League movement, helping to establish 2500 American branches in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Ford articulated his hatred of Great Britain in a collection of letters and accusations against British imperialism and tyranny in Ireland and beyond, published posthumously – see Patrick Ford, *The Criminal History of the British Empire* (New York: Irish World, 1915). See “Patrick Ford Dead at 76,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1913. Ford devoted much of his energy to asserting that the Irish were the most American of any group. He argued that they had arrived with the democratic principles, intellect, and patriotism that had typically been reserved to Anglo-Americans. He emphasized that his readers understand American history, though he branded as un-American clandestine organizations like the Clan na Gael and overtly Irish organizations like the AOH – see James Paul Rodechko, *Patrick Ford and his Search for America: A Case Study of Irish-American Journalism, 1870-1913* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 261-268.

detach the case of Ireland from America! Together, I am ready as an Irishman, to say, together America and Ireland will stand, and if need be, together America and Ireland will fall!” According to Creel, “this intimacy of relation was not due entirely to actual Irish assistance, but sprang also from the feeling that the American Colonies had much in common with Ireland by reason of a common oppressor.”<sup>3</sup>

FOIF and the *Gaelic American* continually equated the Irish struggle with England to America’s struggle for independence in 1776, and this was a recurring theme throughout the era. As the minutes from a 1916 meeting of Irish Americans in the Philadelphia Opera House said, “Ireland’s sons in America have been true to this Republic and have fought gallantly in every war for the preservation of its independence, integrity, and its honor, from the Revolution to the present day. The enemy which menaced and plotted to destroy the United States was in all cases England, and we therefore, hope the American people will not permit their government to come to England’s aid against Ireland in this supreme crisis of Ireland’s fate.” The Irish Progressive League insinuated that the Irish could have swung the verdict in the Revolutionary War had they been forced to do so. If the Irish had been eligible for conscription and thus available to fight in the British Army, the Irish people asked of Woodrow Wilson in a pamphlet issued by the Irish Progressive League, “is it certain that your Republic would today flourish in the enjoyment of its noble Constitution?”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> T.P. O’Connor, March 16, 1918 speech at the Annual banquet of the IFC in Chicago, IFC Papers, Folder 1 of 4 (Reports), Chicago Historical Society; Creel, *Ireland’s Fight for Freedom*, 170-171.

<sup>4</sup> Doorley, *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism*, 28; Minutes of a 1916 meeting in the Philadelphia Opera House, Folder 3, Box 8, William Maloney Papers, NYPL; “Address to the President of the United States from the People of Ireland,” Irish Progressive League, Folder 14, Box 9, William Maloney Papers, NYPL. The Irish Progressive League formed in 1917 with the intention of securing representation for Ireland at the impending peace conference after the war. It was absorbed by FOIF after the war though – see Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 207-209.

The Irish equated the fight for Irish freedom with the war the American patriots had won in the eighteenth century by claiming that that Washington and his followers were the Sinn Feiners of their era. Under the headline “Irish Genius has Always Guided America,” the *Pilot* ran the speech of the Honorable William H. O’Brien at a large gathering of the George Washington Branch of the Friends of Irish Freedom in Boston. In the plea for complete Irish independence, O’Brien admitted that he was unable to view the situation without significant biases,

because of the ever present frightful picture, as drawn by English historians, of English bayonets running red with the blood of unborn Irish infants, through the refusal of the prospective mother to reveal the whereabouts of the husband, father, and son who were engaged in the same god-like work by which Washington and his fellow Sinn Feiners destroyed English rule of the American colonies and established this wonderful nation of ours that for 143 years has stood as the beacon light to all civilization.”<sup>5</sup>

Washington and the Americans were Sinn Feiners because they fought for the same principles that the contemporary Sinn Feiners did.

Irish (not Irish-American) nationalist Liam Mellows wrote of the “remarkable parallel” which existed between the case of Ireland in 1919 and America in 1776. English propaganda painted the American patriots of 1776 and the Irish Republicans of 1919 as “irresponsible hotheads, murderers” and each side had to deal with a significant minority attempting to undermine their respective movements, the Tories in America and the Ulster minority in Ireland. Each experienced wartime morale and monetary problems, and each desperately needed worldwide recognition. In the end, each faced the same oppressor and could only succeed by a policy of “No Compromise.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Pilot*, December 20, 1919.

<sup>6</sup> *Irish Press*, August 23, 1919.

FOIF called on England to act with altruism. “A voluntary act of simple justice to Ireland today” (“or to America in 1776”) would lead to “the infinitely greater credit of England than any amount of subsequent propaganda. But England statesmen are as blind in 1920 as they were in 1776 and the course of events in Ireland will parallel that in the United States.” Arthur Griffith wrote to Dr. Patrick McCartan, who published his letter in the *Irish Press* on the subject of the War of 1812. During that war, “the English then misrepresented the Americans to the world equally as they misrepresent now the Irish to the Americans.” A FOIF press release drew parallels between the inhumane conditions to which the British subjected their prisoners. “When the American colonies were struggling for freedom, England’s prison ships were crowded with American patriots. Today the prison ships of England are built of steel instead of wood – but the hearts that they confine beat high for liberty. In 1775 it was America; today it is Ireland,” it concluded.<sup>7</sup>

Irish periodicals relentlessly equated their political opponents with Revolutionary-era Tories. The Tories of 1776 and 1921 both painted the patriots as ungrateful rebels, Washington as a traitor, and Jefferson as a “Sinn Fein extremist agitator who should have been hanged like Roger Casement.” The Boston Tea Party was “anarchist outrage,” while John Paul Jones and Commodore Barry were “pirates of the blackest dye.” According to the *Monitor*, “The whole cause of American independence stank in the nostrils of British Toryism, just as the cause of Irish independence is a rock of offense to their descendants in America today.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Frightfulness and History,” January 1, 1921, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter* of FOIF, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Arthur Griffith to Patrick McCartan, *Irish Press*, March 30, 1918; Undated press release, Folder 11 (Irish National Bureau, clipping file), Box 22, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>8</sup> *Monitor*, March 12, 1921.

New York Senator James A. O’Gorman used American history to plea for clemency on behalf of Sir Roger Casement, as well as compare the condemned rebel to George Washington. “What is the demarcation between the rebel who triumphs and the one who fails?” asked O’Gorman. “If Sir Roger Casement be a criminal, then George Washington and John Hancock and John Adams were criminals. They were all rebels protesting against wrong and tyranny,” he said. O’Gorman asked that Wilson ask for clemency in his role as American president, just as Grant had done with Irish prisoners in 1869, Seward had done in 1867 for Maximilian, and Jefferson had done in 1793 in asking for General Lafayette’s release from imprisonment in France. O’Gorman pointed to the case of Mary Surratt, arguing that had a European country interceded and convinced the U.S. “that a cruel unspeakable injustice was inflicted in time of terror upon an innocent woman...we Americans of this generation, at least, would be grateful for the intercession, for it might have spared the writing of one of the saddest pages in the annals of the Civil War.” The Knights of St. Patrick from San Francisco appealed on Casement’s behalf based on the “divine right of revolution” and pointed to earlier American appeals on behalf of Lafayette, Kossuth, Maximilian and others.<sup>9</sup>

The *Irish World* compared the victims of the 1916 Easter Rising to the American Revolutionary patriots and the infamous Black and Tans to the Hessian mercenaries

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<sup>9</sup> *Gaelic American*, August 12, 1916; Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, 71. Sir Roger Casement was a moderate Parnellite as a young man, but he was radicalized through his experiences working in the British Foreign Service. After his experiences covering and participating in the Boer War and his investigation of the atrocities committed by Belgian King Leopold II in the Congo Free State, Casement turned toward anti-imperialism and began to embrace Irish political separatism. In the United States when the war began, Casement conspired with the German government to plan the Easter Rising. After traveling via submarine to Dublin, he was arrested and hanged for treason – see Seamus O. Siochain, *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2008), xv-xvi. Knighted in 1911 for his service in the British Foreign Service, Casement was stripped of those honors upon his 1916 execution. In response to pleas for clemency, the British released the infamous “Black Diaries,” which expressed Casement’s homosexuality and attraction to young men in detail. His supporters charged authorities with forging the diaries, though the author of one major biography has authenticated them – see B.L. Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement* (New Haven: Yale, 1976).

employed by King George III. After putting Roger Casement and sixteen others to death for doing “what Washington and his fellow patriots did,” the British decided they had slander the names of the convicted rebels to mollify the American backlash against such brutalities. The United States, of course, had let Jefferson Davis and the other “leaders of the greatest rebellion known to history” go “scot free,” but the British were unforgiving and sought to paint the Irish rebels with the same brush as they had the American patriots: “History tells us in what black colors she painted the American character at the time of the American Revolution. Washington himself was represented as a would be traitor to his country for the sake of British gold.” When Judge Cohalan received an inquiry from the *Pittsburgh Press-Gazette* on what would have become George Washington had he failed to win the Revolutionary War, he discussed a wide array of historical subversives in British history and asked “what real American is gullible enough now to believe, in spite of the mock heroics in which English spokesmen recently have indulged when talking of Washington, that he would have escaped the fate of other opponents of English rule had he failed in his fight for American Independence.”<sup>10</sup>

To further appeal to American sensibilities, the Irish claimed that the Americans had to deal with Black and Tans back in 1776. George III had hired Hessians as mercenary terrorists to “wreak vengeance on the homes and families of the patriot forces under Washington.” The “Black and Tan generals of ‘76” tried to subvert the American patriots with terrorism, to no avail.<sup>11</sup> The British would fail this time around if only Americans remembered their experience and held steadfast to their principles.

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<sup>10</sup> *Irish World*, September 16, 1916; Cohalan in *Gaelic American*, February 28, 1920.

<sup>11</sup> *Irish Press*, June 25, 1921. The “Black and Tans” were British soldiers sent into Ireland after the Great War to keep order (following the declaration of the Irish Republic in December 1918). While they were supposed to target the Irish Republican Army, they often were engaged in disputes with Irish civilians.

The American Irish compared jailed Irish freedom fighters and rebels to American Revolutionary patriots. In a February 1920 directive to the president, FOIF claimed that the Irish patriots languishing in British jails was comparable to when “England’s prison ships were crowded with American patriots. Today also the prison ships of England confine hearts that beat high for liberty. In 1775 it was America; today it is Ireland.” FOIF encouraged readers to stay the course in the fight for Irish freedom. All “fair- minded Americans” were to encourage Ireland to “Remember that the American patriots were persecuted and subjected to coercion tyranny; and the more the English persecuted the American patriots, the stronger America’s cause became. So it will be with Ireland.”<sup>12</sup>

FOIF used anecdotal evidence to show how the Irish in the 1770s were supporters of the American Revolution. In June 1920, a FOIF *News Letter* told the story of Irishman James Shanley, who had left Ireland in May 1777, six weeks prior to offering his services to the Revolutionary cause. He wrote, “there are many staunch friends of that cause in Ireland, but they dare not declare themselves openly.” The *Monitor* printed Ben Franklin’s 1778 letter to the Irish people, in which he touched on the exploitation of Ireland and America, the sympathy Americans had for Ireland, and a promise of American assistance in the future.<sup>13</sup> For Irish-American leaders, the time had come to fulfill Franklin’s pledge.

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<sup>12</sup> “Attention! President Wilson,” February 6, 1920, Folder 8 (National Secretary – *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1919-June 1920), Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS. “Tyranny, not Law,” August 21, 1920, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>13</sup> “Mason Resolution is not Dead,” June 12, 1920, Folder 8 (*News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*), Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Monitor*, August 16, 1919.

The Irish alluded to similar financial difficulties experienced by the American patriots and the Irish Republicans. Many Irish and Irish Americans objected to Americans purchasing bond certificates from the Irish Republic because of the possibility that the Republic's failure would leave buyers devoid of their investments. To assuage these concerns, the *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau* (hereafter *News Letter*) compared the situation to that of the American colonies in the late 1770s. In listing the yearly issues of Bills of Credit for the American colonies from 1775-1779, the *News Letter* informed readers that "when the Continental Congress financed America's struggle for freedom, there was no guarantee of repayment of monies borrowed, or paper money issued."<sup>14</sup>

Many Irish leaders and organizations attacked the Irish "moderates" who sought only limited Home Rule for Ireland, and they used the American Revolution to strengthen their argument for complete independence. These "moderates" back in 1776 were "the type of those who urged Washington, during the dark days of Valley Forge, to yield to an improved form of Colonial government," reported a FOIF *News Letter*. It also claimed that "eighty-five percent of the people of Ireland are recorded as determined to support the Republic," which was "fully as large as the percentage as prevailed in the American Colonies when the struggle for independence was being waged." As the *Citizen* stated August 8, 1919, "If Dominion Home Rule, which means government as a British crown colony, is such a good thing, why did George Washington and other American colonists repudiate and revolt against that form of government in 1776?" After then printing the vote tallies for New York, Massachusetts, and Virginia on the ratification of the American Constitution, it equated the "moderates" and "minorities" who opposed the

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<sup>14</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, May 29, 1920.

American Constitution with the “minorities” in contemporary Ireland (those who supported an Anglo-Irish Union like Edward Carson, Horace Plunkett, and others). As the Irish National Bureau stated, “America had her Tories in ’76. Ireland has her Tories today. Their name is Carsonites.”<sup>15</sup>

Just as the case had been during the Revolutionary War, British corruption reigned supreme in Ireland. The British enticed Irish leaders to agree to a limited form of freedom (Home Rule) in exchange for political office. As James K. McGuire pointed out in comparing John Redmond and Benedict Arnold, it had happened before. Just as the British government had lured Arnold over to their side by offering him high office, they had turned John Redmond into a traitor through the Home Rule Bill. “I cannot help thinking that the prospect of high office under the local Home Rule bill has been all persuasive in inducing John Redmond to adopt a course that will lead to many friends of Ireland comparing him to Benedict Arnold.” T.P. O’Connor of the Irish Parliamentary Party visited the United States with the intention of selling the American public on the Home Rule Bill. Charging Mr. O’Connor with hoping to sell the Irish majority out for political favors from the English, the *Irish World* called O’Connor a “denationalized Irishman” and faux Irish envoy to America. By selling out his countrymen, he was compared to the most infamous of American traitors. “This Irish Benedict Arnold should

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<sup>15</sup> “The Moderates of ’76,” August 28, 1920, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, January 23, 1920; *Citizen*, August 8, 1919. Both of these figures are inflated, as neither eighty-five percent of the American colonists nor the Irish in 1918-1919 were republicans. Plunkett was a Protestant Irish Unionist who spent a great deal of time in the United States, ranching in northern Wyoming’s Big Horn Mountains for the better part of the 1880s. He was a moderate Home Ruler by the 1910s, but the Irish national Bureau obviously ignored this – see Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett: Co-Operation and Politics, an Irish Biography* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986). Edward Carson was a Unionist who ultimately exerted a tremendous deal of influence in the north-south Irish division. Carson believed strongly in religious toleration and held to the belief that should northern Ireland be incorporated into an Irish Republic, they would suffer under a Popish majoritarian religious tyranny – see Geoffrey Lewis, *Carson: The Man who Divided Ireland* (London: Hambledon, 2005), ix-xiii.

receive from Irish-Americans the reception his perfidy to Ireland so richly deserves,” said the *Irish World*.<sup>16</sup>

The American Irish felt shortchanged by the American government’s negotiations at Versailles because of their level of contribution to America’s freedom back in 1776. France, for example, received the rich Saar basin and assurances from the United States that its territorial integrity would not be compromised again. France received these promises because after all, “France has suffered, and France helped us in our Revolution.” “Then why not equal solicitude for Ireland” wondered the *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, which pointed out that Ireland had also donated all of her national resources to American independence. Nevertheless, if the American Congress passed the League of Nations Covenant, thus “confirming England’s military domination and possession” of Ireland, then the Irish people would have been “betrayed by that America for whose liberty was shed more of Irish blood than of any other race.”<sup>17</sup>

When critics of Irish independence charged that only a radical minority sought a complete break with the British, the American Irish cited as an example of the Revolutionary colonies and how that had turned out. In a pamphlet entitled “Why Not an Irish Republic? A Plea for the Complete Independence of Ireland”, Denis A. McCarthy connected Irish interests in 1918 and American interests in 1775. The cover of the pamphlet included a quote from a July 1775 “Address to the People of Ireland” from the

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<sup>16</sup> McGuire, *The King, the Kaiser, and Irish Freedom*, 233-234; *Irish World*, June 30, 1917. T.P. O’Connor had spent much of his adult life in England, so this charge of being a denationalized Irishman seems to carry some validity. Benedict Arnold’s reputation as the most notorious traitor in American history (even more so than the leaders of the Confederate States of America) has undergone a serious reclamation in recent years. According to biographer James Kirby Martin, Arnold poured his heart and soul into the patriot cause, eschewing his health and much of his financial security. Besmirched by false accusations and unfairly passed over for promotion, Arnold grew to resent the Revolution – see James Kirby Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 25, 1919.

Continental Congress. In response to those who claimed that many Irishmen would have voted against an Irish Republic in 1918, McCarthy applied the same question to the American colonies in 1775. As would be the case with Ireland, McCarthy pointed out that had a plebiscite been taken in the American colonies in 1775, there would have been plenty of votes for the political status quo. Tories were to blame, McCarthy said. As there had been plenty of Tories in the colonies in 1775, there were plenty in Ireland in 1918. "If Tory votes were counted as American votes, they would have shown divided people. They would have shown that Americans could not agree among ourselves as to the form of government they wanted." It was necessary, McCarthy asserted, to "apply the lessons of American history to Ireland."<sup>18</sup>

George Creel felt that the Ulstermen of the First World War era were equivalent to the American Tories of the Revolutionary War era. As Ulster leaders "tremble at the thought of separation from England," the American Tories "in their attempt to cripple Washington" had "'trembled' morning, noon, and night" as they protested against American independence. Even as these "loyalists" went "into the British service to fight their fellow-Americans, history does not record that Washington yielded to this minority in any degree." After hearing of Lloyd George's moderate Home Rule proposal in early 1920, Daniel T. O'Connell and the Irish National Bureau released a message appealing to American patriotism by applying the situation in contemporary Ireland to the American colonies in rebellion. It asked whether Washington and his fellow American patriots would have consented to a government

that gave a veto to the English ministry; that gave to England the right to supervise the collection and application of customs moneys; that divided the

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<sup>18</sup> Denis A. McCarthy, "Why Not an Irish Republic? A Plea for the Complete Independence of Ireland," Denis Aloysius McCarthy Papers, Folder 4, Box 2, Burns Library, Boston College.

thirteen colonies in to two parts, with both parts obliged to elect representatives to the British Parliament; that would have segregated one section of the country into a state where all the Tories could reside and glory in English rule and mock American patriotism and love of liberty?

As the *Western Catholic* said, “During our Revolutionary War there were many Americans who wanted to remain with England. They were of course in the minority, just as are the people of Ulster. They were Tories, not Americans in the real sense, just as the handful in Ulster are not real Irish but only Scotch commuters.” The American patriots refused to capitulate to the minority of Tories, and the Irish would be well-served to follow that example.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the Irish had long claimed Scotch-Irish immigrants of notable prestige as their own.

The American Irish used the ratification of the American Constitution to make their point, comparing the moderates in Ireland to the anti-federalist moderates who had opposed the ratification. Daniel T. O’Connell used the Federalist struggle to demonstrate the necessity of pressing forward in Ireland despite the Protestant minority. When responding to the argument that the Ulster Irish constituted a substantial minority in Ireland, O’Connell wrote the United States Senate. “What is a ‘substantial minority?’” asked O’Connell. The “convention that met in Philadelphia in 1787 and drafted the United States Constitution was confronted, from start to finish, with ‘substantial minorities.’” To further illustrate his point, he listed each state’s vote on ratification. Therefore, it was necessary for “those who talk about the ‘Ulster substantial minority’ to reflect and study our own history.” For “if Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton,

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<sup>19</sup> Creel, *Ireland’s Fight for Freedom*, 148-149; Daniel T. O’Connell and the Irish National Bureau’s response to Lloyd George’s suggestion on Irish government, Irish National Bureau Clipping File, January – March 1920, Folder 2, Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Western Catholic*, September 24, 1920. For an excellent array of articles on Ulster and its relation to Irish nationalism, see D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day, editors, *The Ulster Crisis, 1885-1921* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Madison, Jay, Marshall and others had bowed before the will or the argument of the ‘substantial minorities’ of the colonies,” asked O’Connell, “would they have been successful in establishing the great nation that so recently saved Europe, and also saved the same nation (England) which from 1787 to 1790 encouraged ‘substantial minorities’ in all the colonies...to oppose the will of the majority.” O’Connell went on to argue that the Ulster minority was not “as strong or representative” as the Anti-Federalist opposition in Massachusetts, Virginia, or New York had been in 1788. He encouraged the Senators to take that into consideration when opponents of Irish self-determination cited the Ulster minority as a reason for opposing the Irish Republic.<sup>20</sup>

John T. Hughes also used George Washington to make their political points. Hughes founded AARIR and was lifelong friends with Eamon de Valera. In a letter to Hughes, a political ally compared de Valera to Washington. After pointing out that he shared a birthday with Washington (and dating the letter that day, February 22<sup>nd</sup>), Irish author (and Irish Volunteer) Frank Gallagher stated that while “there is no comparison at all between the two men in their personalities there is a likeness in their outlook and their essential democracy.” Specifically, Gallagher noticed the “extraordinary parallels between the manner in which he [Washington] was denounced both before and after the Jay Treaty and the way a minority here assail DeValera.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell to all U.S. Senators, August 21, 1919; Folder 17 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, August-November 1919), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Gallagher to John T. Hughes, Folder 8, Box 1, John T. Hughes Collection, Burns Library, Boston College. Bracketed text added. Gallagher fought alongside Eamon de Valera during the Irish War of Independence. Born in New York in 1882, De Valera participated in the Easter Rising and led the anti-Treaty forces (who ultimately lost, leading to the division of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State) in the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923. He would come into conflict with the leadership of the Friends of Irish Freedom over their role in the movement for an Irish republic. De Valera viewed them as an ancillary organization that should obey his orders, including how to spend the money accumulated in the FOIF coffers. His poor choice of analogy in using the U.S.-Cuban relationship under the Platt Amendment as an ideal arrangement suitable for the British-Irish situation further divided the two camps – see Tim Pat

The Irish used Washington's experiences during the Revolutionary War as a way to plea for fortitude and to ward off any consternation with slow progress. O'Connell and the Irish National Bureau also called for resiliency in making sure that the Irish Republic was eventually recognized. O'Connell noted that Washington, while at Valley Forge, had come under "more criticism by the Tories of his day than is Ireland today by those who believe she cannot win independence. Thank God he was not fainthearted!" It took seven years before the American Republic was established, so patience was necessary to win.<sup>22</sup>

O'Connell even used Washington's words from Mt. Vernon in 1788 to make his case stronger. He quoted the Father of the American nation in calling "Patriots of Ireland! Champions of liberty in all lands!" to "be strong in hope! Your cause is identical with mine. You are calumniated in your day; I was misrepresented by the loyalists of my day. Had I failed, the scaffold would be my doom. But now my enemies pay me honor. Had I failed I would have deserved the same honor. I stayed true to my cause, even when victory had fled. In that I merited success. You must act likewise." O'Connell pointed out that Ireland was yet to meet her Valley Forge and she and her

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Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 162-166 and Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 270. Cohalan and Devoy resented DeValera when he attempted to influence American politics. DeValera was willing to support the League of Nations if Ireland was admitted into the organization, but Irish-American nationalists opposed American entry into the League unequivocally. When DeValera called for American entry into the League of nations as a prerequisite to make the world safe for democracy, the Irish Americans denounced this as Wilsonian drabble. To them, this was none of DeValera's business – see T. Ryle Dwyer, *De Valera: The Man & the Myths* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1991), 34-35. DeValera was able to raise significant funds during his trip to the United States in 1919-1920; for a discussion of this trip from an author who deemed it a general success, see Owen Dudley Edwards, *Eamon DeValera* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Daniel T. O'Connell and the Irish National Bureau's response to Lloyd George's suggestion on Irish government, Folder 2 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, January – March 1920), Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

supporters would need to “be guided by Washington and the American patriots of ‘76” as they stayed their course.<sup>23</sup>

Irish leaders quoted from Revolutionary-era Irish Americans to make their case for contemporary Irish freedom. In a speech at the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Charitable Irish Society in 1912, Richard Lane referenced CIS President Mackie in his remarks after the re-convening of the society following the Revolutionary War. Lane quoted Mackie, who congratulated members of the CIS on “the joyous occasion that we are assembled again after ten years absence by a dreadful and ruinous war of near eight years; also that we have conquered one of the greatest and most potent nations on the globe so far as to have peace and independence. May our friends, countrymen in Ireland, behave like the brave Americans until they recover their liberties.”<sup>24</sup>

Irish-American leaders also quoted contemporary Irish leaders and their use of American Revolutionary history to make their case for Irish freedom. An address to President Wilson from the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Laurence O’Neill (on behalf of the people of Ireland, acting in place of Arthur Griffith and Eamon de Valera, who had been arrested), argued that the United States owed Ireland the independence Wilson promised at the war’s outset, and this was couched in terms of American freedom. “To-day, as in the days of George Washington, nearly half of the American forces have been furnished from our banished race,” claimed O’Neill. He went on to make the point that it was not fair to fight to make the world safe for democracy in “every country but our own. Surely

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<sup>23</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell and the Irish National Bureau’s response to Lloyd George’s suggestion on Irish government, Folder 2 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, January – March 1920), Box 21, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Lane, speech at 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, Folder 4 (March 18, 1912), Box 3 (Social Papers, 1912-1914), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

this cannot be the meaning of America's message glowing from the pen of her illustrious President?"<sup>25</sup>

According to the American Irish, further symbolic parallels existed. The *Irish Press* (a paper that sided with De Valera in his power struggle with Devoy and Cohalan) compared Eamon de Valera's attempt to gain recognition from the American government to Ben Franklin's trip to France in 1776 in search of their country's blessing. De Valera had been asked to delegate his job to a group of American politicians, though, which was unfair in the eyes of the authors since Ben Franklin had done his work himself back in 1776.<sup>26</sup>

The American Irish also demonstrated how the Irish emulated the most sacred of American documents. In a September 1920 pamphlet, Blanche Marie Brine pointed out that the first act of the Congress of the Republic of Ireland was to adopt a "Declaration of Independence similar in many ways to that adopted by the Continental Congress of America in 1776," thus establishing that "the Irish people is by right a free people." The *Irish World* noted that the Irish Republicans of the First World War era could apply the specific grievances outlined by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence against the British. The article cited Captain Bowen-Colthurst's murder of the Easter Rising rebel Mr. Sheehy Skeffington and two other Irish editors ("For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us, For protecting them, by a mock trial, for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states"), the Defence [sic] of the Realm Act ("for depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury"), and the "so-called Act

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<sup>25</sup> Laurence O'Neill et al., letter to President Wilson, June 11, 1918, printed in Common Cause Forum pamphlet, Folder July-October 1918, Box 9 (Business Papers, 1917-1922), CIS Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Press*, July 10, 1920.

of Union of 1801” (“for suspending our legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever”) as examples of this.<sup>27</sup>

The paper applied John Adams’s statement about the American Declaration of Independence requiring protection (and possibly bloodshed to defend) to the Irish Declaration of 1916; the Irish needed protection as well. The *Irish World* pointed to a cablegram from Cork in demonstrating how the British were quartering troops in large numbers in Ireland, just as they had in the American colonies back in the eighteenth century. The British government protected these troops, even when they “broke out of the barracks and ranged through the streets, smashing plate glass windows in every direction, and throwing the contents of shops into the roadway.” After two hours of these disturbances, they had destroyed thirty-five shops, with “the splintering of windows being hailed with violent cheering.” The *Irish World* compared the looting to what had happened in Boston in 1770: “We have here a specimen of the treatment Irish communities are subjected to at the hands of England’s hired man-killers – treatment similar to that which led up to what is known in American history as the Boston Massacre.”<sup>28</sup>

The British had also disregarded the Irish Parliament, the Dail Eirean, in 1920 just as they had done with self-governing bodies in Massachusetts in 1774. The *Irish World* quoted the Declaration of Independence in comparing the American situation in 1776 to the Irish situation in 1920:

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<sup>27</sup> Blanche Marie Brine, “Sinn Fein: An Epitome,” September 1920, Folder 4, Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Irish World*, June 30, 1917.

<sup>28</sup> *Irish World*, July 3, 1920. The murder of Sheehy-Skeffington enflamed Irish nationalistic passions on both sides of the Atlantic. According to Jonathan Githens-Mazer, the execution of Sheehy-Skeffington and subsequent persecution of his widow radicalized mainstream Irish opinion and led to the rise of Sinn Fein to prominence – see Githens-Mazer, *Myths and Memories*, 213.

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatever...For quartering large bodies of troops amongst us. For protecting them, by mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants for these States. For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world. For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury. For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses.<sup>29</sup>

Irish independence was necessary for the exact same reasons that American independence had been.

Since the Irish had never consented to English authority, the Irish had a better case for independence than the American colonies. Thomas J. Mahony of Boston compared British taxation without representation in the American colonies to Cromwellian persecution, Penal legislation and the Land Laws in Ireland. He thought that upon reading Jefferson's accusations against the King in the Declaration of Independence, one "might believe that Jefferson was writing of present day events in Ireland...if for these causes the colonies were justified in rebellion in 1776, Ireland is a thousand times more justified in her rebellion today." Mahony pointed out that Irish political philosopher William Molyneux had justified legislative independence for Ireland on the basis of the ideas articulated by John Locke all the way back in 1697 (he pointed out that this was much earlier than Jefferson and the Americans had latched on to such ideas). Mahony claimed that Ireland was more entitled to independence because of its distinct nationhood. Whereas Americans were willingly born into the British nationality, the separate "race, language, culture, politics and history" of the Irish made their independence more urgent.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Irish World*, July 3, 1920.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas H. Mahony, "Similarities Between the American and Irish Revolutions," address at the quarterly meeting of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, New York, May 2, 1921, pg. 7-9.

James McHugh, the National Organizer of the Friends of Irish Freedom, gave a speech to the Lafayette Branch of the Friends of Irish Freedom in which he compared the use of the term “rebels” as it applied to the American patriots of the eighteenth century and the Irish rebels of the early 1920s. “Whatever ground Great Britain had for calling the American patriots ‘rebels,’ however, no ground exists for the title being given the men who are fighting for the freedom of Ireland. While the Thirteen Colonies were at one time a part of the British Empire, Ireland has always been a nation, and was never voluntarily a party to the Act of Union.” After explaining that the men of Ireland were “fighting for their homes, just as were the founders of this, the greatest of all Republics,” McHugh quoted Lincoln in wondering whether America still stood for the principle of “government of the people, by the people and for the people.”<sup>31</sup>

The British press characterized the Irish people in a similar manner to how they had treated the Americans during the American Revolution. Wright McCormack claimed in October 1920 that the “contemporaneous newspaper accounts of the American Revolution are strikingly paralleled by the treatment of the present struggle in Ireland in the English press today.” In a pamphlet entitled “Ireland and America, A Comparison: How English Readers Perceived the ‘Facts’ About the American Revolution,” Willard De Lue insisted that “Ireland’s fight today is the same which our forefathers made successfully, and it is against the same enemy, armed with the same weapons for poisoning public opinion throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> James McHugh, speech to Lafayette Branch of FOIF, *Michigan Catholic*, May 26, 1921.

<sup>32</sup> Willard De Lue, “Ireland and America, A Comparison: How English Readers Perceived the ‘Facts’ About the American Revolution,” 1920, National Secretary, Folder 4 (National Secretary – Pamphlets), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Wright McCormack, “The Irish Republic and the United States: England’s Traditional Attitude,” October 1920, No. 28, Folder 4 (National Secretary – Pamphlets), Box 5; FOIF Papers, AIHS.

The Irish made military comparisons between the Irish independence fighters and the ragtag American forces of the American Revolution. Thomas H. Mahony reasoned that Americans unfamiliar with or unwilling to embrace their own history often viewed the IRA and Sinn Fein fighters in a derogatory fashion. These “so-called Americans” accused the IRA of being a guerilla band devoid of proper uniforms, spreading a “reign of terror” throughout Ireland. This ignored American history though, for “if the Irish are wrong in defending themselves against the invader by guerilla methods, then the colonists were wrong in applying the same methods to a similar rebellion against that same tyrant who vauntingly boasts that it can rule any and every people better than those people can rule themselves.” Mahony quoted a discussion between Washington and Lafayette in which they lamented the lack of proper uniforms for the soldiers and the necessity of guerilla warfare. “Guerilla or predatory warfare had no taint of shame for Washington. God knows that England hated him even as she hates Ireland’s guerilla fighters today under Collins,” said Mahony, who noted that “where Washington trod no man need hesitate follow.” Besides, this Irish “Reign of Terror” was more like “peaceful persuasion” when compared with the Reign of Terror to which American colonists subjected Loyalists after the American Revolution. Lynch laws, tar and feathering, and property confiscation were the norm for those American Tories.<sup>33</sup>

One Irish paper placed a call to action to all Americans by saying “Americans! Arise now! Awake now! The enemy of the Irish republic is the enemy of our own American Republic! Re-adopt the Constitution of the United States, renew the Declaration of Independence, throw off the yoke of British dominance and throw open

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas H. Mahony, “Similarities Between the American and Irish Revolutions,” address at the quarterly meeting of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, New York, May 2, 1921, quote on pg. 9-13.

the doors of the family of nations to our sister Republic – the Republic of Ireland.”<sup>34</sup>

Whereas many well-known Irishmen had thanked America for providing Ireland with a refuge for its surplus citizens in the 1800s, they now felt it was time the United States repay the debt owed to those sons of Erin who had contributed so much to America.

### **A Revolutionary Debt**

Because of their service to America and the similar circumstances that Ireland faced in attempting to forge its freedom, the American Irish claimed that it was high time America returned the favor. They consistently referenced the American Revolution in justifying their opposition to the position staked out by the American government. This remained their primary ammunition in this war over the meaning of American involvement in the Great War and its place in the postwar world.

The *Irish Standard* questioned the lack of American support for Ireland, especially considering how Americans were so grateful to the French for coming to their aid during the American Revolution. “Were not the contributions of the Irish people in men and resources a more vital element to our success in the war of the Revolution than even those of France, valuable as these were?” asked the author. Americans unfairly held “manifest generous gratitude” to the French, “while begrudging or withholding our moral and material support to the people of Ireland.”<sup>35</sup> It was imperative that the American Irish take it upon themselves to inform the general public of Irish contributions.

The Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago, in a flyer urging the American government to recognize the Irish Republic (as it already had the Polish and Czecho-Slovak

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<sup>34</sup> *Citizen*, February 11, 1921.

<sup>35</sup> *Irish Standard*, April 19, 1919.

Republics), cited the Irish contribution to the American Revolution as one of the main reasons for the U.S. needing to do so. The Irish role in the American Revolution meant that Wilson owed Ireland better than he was giving them. “Attested to by Washington himself, by Franklin, by John Adams, by Washington Parke Custis and many others,” the Irish had played a major role in the Revolutionary War; the IFC flyer claimed that 37.83 percent of all American forces were “sons of Ireland.”<sup>36</sup>

The Irish Race Convention of February 1919 adopted as its first resolution that “We are loyal American citizens who upheld the honor and interests of the United States, as our race has done during all the years that have elapsed from the start of the Revolution to the present day.” Michael J. O’Brien opened his February 22, 1919 address to the Irish Race Convention in Philadelphia by saying that “One of the many reasons why American citizens of Irish blood believe that the Government of the United States should instruct its representatives at the Peace Conference to see to it that the principle of Self-Determination, as enunciated by President Wilson, should be applied to Ireland in the same manner as it is about to be applied to the other small nations, is that America owes a debt to Ireland for services rendered, and now is the psychological moment in which to pay it.”<sup>37</sup>

In the days of the American Revolution, over ten thousand Irishmen had made the trip across the sea to “die at Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and other

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<sup>36</sup> IFC flyer, General Reports, Folder 2 of 3, IFC Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

<sup>37</sup> Irish Race Convention Resolutions, February 22-23, 1919, Folder 10, Box 7, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; Michael J. O’Brien address to Irish Race Convention, printed in *Gaelic American*, March 22, 1919. An outgrowth of this February 1919 Irish Race Convention was the American Commission on Irish Independence, which was established to lobby President Wilson on behalf of Irish self-determination in 1919. Frank P. Walsh, Michael J. Ryan, and Edward F. Dunne traveled to Europe but returned unsuccessfully after getting the cold shoulder from President Wilson – see Funchion, editor, *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations*, 17-22. For a detailed log of the American Commission on Irish Independence and its trip to Europe, see F.M. Carroll, editor, *The American Commission on Irish Independence: The Diary, Correspondence, and Report* (Dublin: Irish manuscripts Commission, 1985).

reddened fields of the revolution, or to rot and starve to death as George Washington's adopted son described in British prison ships" claimed a FOIF directive. "The struggling Irish republic of today asks for no such blood tribute" though. Rather "it asks us only the moral force of our sympathy." The Indianapolis branch of FOIF resolved "THAT AS AMERICAN CITIZENS OF IRISH BLOOD: We assert without fear of successful contradiction that no other race has done more for the American Republic than the Irish race and that if any small nationality in Europe has a right to seek our kindly offices, that small nationality is the Irish nation."<sup>38</sup>

The American Irish argued that Sinn Feiners were treated in a similar fashion to how American slaves had been. They agreed with Robert Lynd of the London Daily News that "an Uncle Tom's Cabin about Ireland in 1921" was needed to draw attention to these atrocities. "The run-away slave, pursued with ship, dog and gun, got your tears half a century ago: the Sinn Feiner 'on the run' today is tracked down by the same merciless means," read the *News Letter*. It went on to further quote Mr. Lynd by saying that "there are few of the cruelties that used to ring your hearts, as you read about the negro slave, that are not being re-enacted in Ireland at the present hour." Despite the best efforts of so many Irish-American leaders, "It is an unfortunate fact that there are also Americans who need the services of a modern Mrs. Stowe."<sup>39</sup>

Irish periodicals used anecdotal stories about Irishmen fighting against the British during the Revolutionary War. These included men like Comte O'Donnell, who led a Polish regiment at Lemberg but signed on with the American cause in July 1777. Baron O'Cahill, a commandant of French troops but "member of an ancient and noble family of

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<sup>38</sup> "Who are the Friends of Irish Freedom?" Folder 3 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, undated), Box 22, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Indianapolis FOIF in *Irish World*, January 27, 1917.

<sup>39</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, January 29, 1921.

Ireland,” joined the patriot cause as well. In February 1779, Captain O’Heguerty, who had “a profession and a fortune, but detests idleness” had thrown in with the colonists. The letters these men left behind “remain as testimonials to Ireland’s support of the American colonists...today, when Ireland asks American aid, their efforts should not be forgotten.” If Americans refused to fight the British control of Ireland, they “would be forced to admit that” back in 1776, “they should have accepted England’s eleventh hour promise of autonomy and not have fought for and won their independence.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Textbooks and Perceived British Propaganda**

“They are guileless people, indeed, who ask for proof of British propaganda on American soil,” read the *Citizen* (Chicago) in January 1921. In fact, “To ask for proof of a British propaganda is just like asking for proof of British selfishness, or greed, or insolence, or deceit. The whole world knows of these. They are ubiquitous. They are a world menace.” FOIF listed their assault on British influence in American media outlets and public schools as one of the nine major accomplishments of the organization in December 1920. “The British devised and controlled anti-American propaganda in the public schools, on the lecture platform, the stage, in the public press, moving pictures, magazines, books and pamphlets,” and FOIF exposed this to the American public, according to the FOIF National Council in December 1920.<sup>41</sup>

How the Irish and the public at large America remembered American history and the role of the Irish in it was of the utmost importance in this period. To a large extent, Irish-American identities were tied to their American contributions. And the fate of

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<sup>40</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, June 12, 1920; March 19, 1921.

<sup>41</sup> *Citizen*, January 21, 1921; “Policy of the Friends of Irish Freedom,” December 29, 1920, Folder 2 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

Ireland was at stake. Certain elements of the population (pro-British elements to the Irish eye) who opposed the Irish mission tried to undermine their contributions to American history and even marginalize the significance of the event altogether. These anti-Irish, anti-American elements included politicians and the mainstream press but most notably historians and authors of school textbooks. They held the power to literally erase the Irish from the American narrative and render negligible the significance of the American Revolution, which would in turn undermine the Irish efforts to have another American Revolution staged in Ireland. In Irish eyes, the Americans should celebrate the American Revolution, not apologize for it. Ireland's future depended on America's past. Edward F. McSweeney accused the British propaganda machine of attempting to de-Americanize Americans through a campaign aimed at undermining "national pride and self-respect and eventually to make the people of the United States ashamed of, and apologetic for, the events which gave it a separate national existence."<sup>42</sup>

The American Irish claimed that the future of freedom everywhere was at stake over the issue of how American history was written and taught. The *News Letter* cited Charles Edward Russell in arguing that minimizing the American victories in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 threatened world liberty. In addition to "real Americans" wishing to preserve pure American history, "untarnished and unsullied by the hands of the propagandists of Great Britain," there was also the fact that the American Revolution had led to the French Revolution and the Latin American independence movements. "Every Hindu agitator comes back to the American Revolution for his

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<sup>42</sup> Edward F. McSweeney, "Attempt of British to De-Americanize Americans," Folder 17 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, August-November 1919), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

inspiration,” read the article, which went on to state that “it is of the utmost importance to England that this fount of Democratic inspiration should be dried up.”<sup>43</sup>

John O’Dea, in charge of AOH Irish History Propaganda, said in 1919 that the Irish-American press remained key to winning Irish independence by telling the story of Irish history. “Irish history is not all in books. It is being written daily-being telegraphed to the ends of the earth-being published in tens of thousands of periodicals-and read by millions of eyes and believed by millions of minds,” said O’Dea. O’Dea’s letter to the AOH warned that anti-Irish forces were conspiring to erase them from the American narrative. The press and Irish societies played an integral role in preserving the Irish-American record. “There is a process of obscuration and mis-statement. The deeds of the Irish race in every land will be obscured and the attitude of our race mis-stated,” he wrote, claiming that “Calumny has been the most evil of all the weapons used against us, and it has been ever-allied with a malevolent hiatus by anti-Irish writers on Irish achievement. Thus, had not Irish researchers and historians retold the story of the American Revolution and of the Civil War we would today be ignorant of the loyalty and the heroism of our own ancestors.” O’Dea went on to say that “to win the mind of the world we must first know our own mind. The mind of the Irish race is visible most glowingly in the Irish and Catholic press. To sustain that press is a high duty. To shun its support is to invite shame. To refuse encouragement to it is to encourage our enemies.” O’Dea concluded by saying that the Irish and Catholic press is “our first, last,

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<sup>43</sup> *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, May 5, 1922. Russell was head of the Creel Bureau in London during the First World War who was called to testify on the revision of American history in textbooks before the Commissioner of Accounts, Hirshfield, in New York City.

and only line of defense, and any Irish Catholic who halts in supporting it is either willfully recreant or ignorantly impotent.”<sup>44</sup>

Patrick J. Haltigan pleaded in his 1907 book, *The Irish in the American Revolution*, that there “exists a disposition to ignore the Irish element in current American books.” He sought to change that. Dedicated to the AOH, Haltigan’s book worked from the premise that all discrimination against the Irish could be traced back to England and that the nefarious Anglo-Saxons had subversively worked to control the content in American schoolbooks. In the course of over six hundred pages, Haltigan outlined the history of Irish immigration to the United States in the various colonies and then proceeded through a detailed narrative of all the battles of the American Revolution in which the Irish participated. Anecdotes celebrating Irish bravery and Washington’s admiration for the Celtic troops, lists of soldiers and officers of Irish extraction, and the Irish ancestry of President Theodore Roosevelt highlight the lengthy book.<sup>45</sup>

James K. McGuire compared those who supported an Anglo-American alliance in World War I to American Tories of the Revolutionary era. “New York City is to-day the stronghold of Toryism and English snobbery, as it was in the days of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln” In fact, London still controlled the New York City press as it had for fifteen decades, according to McGuire. McGuire continued, “In the dark days of 1776 and 1861 the so-called “public opinion” of New York and the newspapers of the city opposed the national and patriotic cause. Washington distrusted the New York City merchant class. In 1861 Abraham Lincoln was caricatured as an ape by the metropolitan

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<sup>44</sup> John O’Dea to AOH, *Pilot*, March 29, 1919.

<sup>45</sup> Patrick J. Haltigan, *The Irish in the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Patrick J. Haltigan, Publisher, 1907), 9.

press, inspired by London.”<sup>46</sup> Of course, this was quite common in the United States, especially in Irish Copperhead circles during the Civil War. That part was left out.

Politicians unfriendly to the Irish cause would often cast doubt on the accuracy of Irish claims on their role in the American Revolution. “The use of history is to teach us how to interrupt the present and prepare for the future. In no country in the world do we need it more,” said the *Leader*, claiming “The pro-English policy of Mr. Wilson and so many of the Easterners is evidence of this truth. This is not the first time that England has been able to use the President of the United States for her own purposes.” The article relayed the story of when British Minister to the United States Robert Liston had poisoned the mind of President John Adams against the Irish because of the “French principles” of the United Irish Societies. “At no time was the need for reviving the memory of Irish services rendered during the American Revolution greater than at the present,” reasoned the *Leader*, because “the pro-British element are telling Americans that the Irish people have no claim upon the sympathy of this country in the effort to secure for themselves the liberty that thousands of Irishmen fought under George Washington to win for America.” Besides, the Scotch-Irish were all Loyalists, and the myth that they dominated the ranks of the Continental Army could not be further from the truth.<sup>47</sup>

Senator James A. O’Gorman relayed the story of Senators Charles S. Thomas from Colorado and Porter J. McCumber of North Dakota casting doubt on California Senator James D. Phelan’s assertion that fifty percent of Washington’s army had been of Irish ancestry. “Well, just what he meant by “Americans” may be a question, considering the sense in which he used the word,” said O’Gorman. He stated that “If you mean by

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<sup>46</sup> McGuire, *The King, the Kaiser, and Irish Freedom*, 231.

<sup>47</sup> *Leader*, October 30, 1915; *Irish World*, January 25, 1919.

the American of that period the immigrant of English ancestry, the record shows that four-fifths of all the inhabitants of America during the Continental period boasting English ancestry remained loyalists, and were the Tories of that period.” After all, the “real Americans” were the Indians killing white settlers as mercenaries for the British in service of the vast majority of English settlers. Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota pointed out that many of the Irishmen that Senator O’Gorman was referring to came from the “North of Ireland” and were thus, not Irish. In response, O’Gorman accused Senator Nelson of not being “an American, because he is Welsh, inasmuch as his grandfather or great-grandfather was a native of Wales.” Since the Irish had colonized Scotland and the Irish of the South had been forced to flee the oppression of the English, the argument held no water. Senator O’Gorman finished by listing off all the Irish contributors to the American Revolution including General Richard Montgomery, Jeremiah O’Brien, John Hancock and other signers of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Thomson, John Nixon, and John Dunlap.<sup>48</sup>

Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi had publically professed that the Irish had no role in the American Revolution and had exaggerated their role in defeating the

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<sup>48</sup> *Gaelic American*, August 12, 1916. Knute Nelson was born in Norway in February 1842 – see Millard L. Gieske and Steven J. Keillor, *Norwegian Yankee: Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923* (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Society, 1995), 3. Senator Phelan was the son of an Irish immigrant and California Progressive, who supported Wilson and lost his seat in the Republican landslide of 1920 – see Robert E. Hennings, *James D. Phelan and the Wilson Progressives of California* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 1. He is quoted as saying that “No man is a true American who does not sympathize with the struggles of weaker nations for justice and liberty” – quoted in Timothy J. Sarbaugh, “Irish Republicanism vs. ‘Pure Americanism’: California’s Reaction to Eamon De Valera’s Visits,” *California History* 60, no. 2(Summer 1981): 184(n.13). Senator McCumber was an “isolationist” who opposed American trade with the Allies in the early years of the First World War; he felt the United States was becoming a “side partner” of the Allied Powers. As the senator of a rural, Midwestern state, McCumber also opposed American rearmament. Nevertheless, he backed Wilson’s January 1917 “peace without victory” speech in which the president called for immediate peace, to be sanctioned by his League of Nations. Angered by Germany’s decision to open unrestricted submarine warfare a few days later, McCumber actually voted in favor of the war resolution and supported American involvement. As such, he was a “Tory isolationist” – see Robert P. Wilkins, “Tory Isolationist: Porter J. McCumber and World War I, 1914-1917,” *North Dakota History* 34, no. 3(1967): 192-207.

Confederacy. Senator Williams claimed that the Irish had never defeated the South and that “they could not whip the South in one county.” The Irish “are always contending that they have done everything, everywhere, at every time,” said Senator Williams, who claimed that “they never won the war for American Revolution” either. Perhaps his greatest insult to Irish-American honor was his assertion that there were “ten Irishmen to one were in the British Army to every Irishman in the American Revolutionary Army.” Williams claimed that only a meager four percent of Washington’s Army had been made up by Irishmen, and two-thirds of them were Scotch-Irish. Williams claimed that during the Civil War, the Irish were intellectually incapable of fighting for Unionist idealism and that they simply fought on “whichever side of the line they happened to be.” To Williams, the Irish were not as committed to the American Union as they claimed.<sup>49</sup>

Senator Williams had numerous run-ins with the Irish during this time period. He opposed immigration and used the Irish (and the Germans) as evidence of “hyphenated” groups who had settled in industrialized sections of the country and been shielded from many American institutions as a result. They had kept their native language and culture, for example. A big supporter of Wilson through the League fight, Senator Williams blasted groups like the Irish as foreign obstructionists whose irrational hatred of England drowned out any loyalty they held for the United States. In February 1917, Williams delivered a speech on the Senate floor asking hyphenated Americans were “just simply blamed-fool common, ordinary Americans, with no allegiance to anybody on the surface of the earth except to our own country.” Williams obviously doubted the prospects of locating any loyal Irish. Two years later, when Senator Borah introduced his resolution

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<sup>49</sup> Unsigned letter [appears to be from Senator John Sharp Williams] to “President”, Folder 17 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, August-November 1919), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

in favor of an Irish republic, sixty senators voted in favor, with the only nay vote coming from Williams. Politicians like William E. Borah were identified as being on the right side of history. Borah was “one of the public men who believes that we should keep our history American, and he fails to see why we should want to expurgate the story of our glorious tradition, in order to mollify England.”<sup>50</sup>

The *Citizen* quoted Michael J. O’Brien’s letter to Williams refuting these supposedly blatant falsehoods. O’Brien quoted Confederate General Robert E. Lee in demonstrating how various Irish-American figures during the Civil War era had followed their hearts in choosing sides. Lee had praised Southern Irishmen like John Mitchel and Patrick Cleburne as well as bravery and honor of Northern Irishmen such as Thomas Francis Meagher. O’Brien closed by saying “I assume you will admit that General Lee was as competent a witness to testify upon the events of the Civil War as General Clinton was upon the events of the Revolutionary War.” O’Brien demanded that Senator Williams withdraw his comments, to no avail.<sup>51</sup>

O’Brien sent Senator Williams a letter soon after, along with a copy of *A Hidden Phase of American History*. While O’Brien conceded that some American Irish, “whose enthusiasm was greater than their knowledge of the facts,” had exaggerated somewhat, he vociferously argued that there was “no doubt” that “America owes more to Ireland for the part played by her sons in the struggle for our independence than she does to any other country on Earth.” Beyond claiming that thirty-eight percent of the Continental Army was of Irish birth or Irish ancestry and attacking the Senator’s claims that most American Irish at the time were Scotch-Irish, O’Brien quoted Englishmen in making his argument.

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<sup>50</sup> George Coleman Osborn, *John Sharp Williams: Planter-Statesman of the Deep South* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 190-191, 281, 349-351; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, June 3, 1922.

<sup>51</sup> *Citizen*, October 31, 1919.

He quoted Henry Clinton warning, “The emigrants from Ireland are in general to be looked upon as our most serious antagonists.” He also used Ambrose Serle, a confidential agent of the British Cabinet, who cautioned contemporaries that the Irish in the American colonies were doing Great Britain “much injury by bringing over numbers...and so adding strength, already too great, to the force of America against her.” O’Brien sarcastically asked in the *News Letter* “Are you a greater authority than General Clinton?” and then reported on the primary sources he had obtained and provided to the Mississippi Senator. The *Gaelic American* felt that O’Brien’s work was of the utmost importance, as “England is doing her utmost to minimize the debt that America owes to the Irish people for the part they played in her early upbuilding and the part they have played in her progress and development and the maintenance of her independence since...no more necessary or beneficial work could at the present time be done.”<sup>52</sup>

According to David Noel Doyle, O’Brien grossly exaggerated the proportion of Irish troops in Washington’s Army. His study of all other nationalities was grossly inadequate, and he analyzed muster rolls “with an arithmetic enthusiastic rather than exact.” Doyle excused O’Brien because he wrote “in the heat of the final Sinn Fein claim for independence against Britain,” and O’Brien was “openly bidding for American support.” Some periodicals, such as the *American Catholic Historical Review*, ran pieces that backed up the arguments of Senator Williams. For example, it cited a letter to the *Sacred Heart Review* in 1910, which claimed that few Irish Catholics (most Catholics

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<sup>52</sup> Michael J. O’Brien to Senator John Sharp Williams, Folder 17 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, August-November 1919), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, April 1, 1922; *Gaelic American*, January 6, 1917. These myths have continued to hold sway in Irish-American circles. For an example of a more recent book that exaggerates Irish contributions to the Revolutionary War (and cites O’Brien, amongst others), see Charles Lucey, *Harp and Sword, 1776: The Irish in the American Revolution* (Washington: American Irish Foundation, 1976).

living in the colonies being Germans) had actually emigrated to the United States in the era and that the American Revolution was “the first anti-Catholic movement in our country.” The author noted that while Catholics should rejoice for the freedom of religion that the Revolution secured for them, hatred of Popery and reaction to the Quebec Act actually motivated many of the patriots.<sup>53</sup>

O’Brien concluded his book with a chapter entitled “America’s Debt to Ireland.” After repaying the country’s debt to France during the First World War, O’Brien called on Americans to repay their debt to the Irish, who had “answered the call with the same cheerful readiness that they have responded to all similar appeals in the wars in which America has been engaged.” O’Brien wondered, “Will the call be heard in America, as the call of the Americans was heard in Ireland one hundred and forty-three years ago?” O’Brien repeatedly referred to Wilsonian idealism in tying the war effort to world freedom, saying “We entered this war to put an end to autocracy and to bring into existence the rule of democracy. That does not mean merely the end of German autocracy, or British autocracy, or Russian autocracy, but of all autocracy.” He continually called for the American war aims to be applied to Ireland, as the American soldiers would have died in vain if the Green Isle were not granted freedom. He asked, “Can we afford to let history record that it was only to the strong that we were grateful, and that in our hour of victory and triumph, when the whole world acclaimed our power and our strength, we turned a deaf ear to the call of the people whose blood has helped us

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<sup>53</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America, 1760-1820* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1981), 137; Martin I.J. Griffin, “The Irish Catholics and the Revolution,” *American Catholic Historical Review* 6(1910): 340-342.

so greatly to make us what we are to-day, and refused to pay to Ireland the debt so long owed?”<sup>54</sup>

To assure this debt could be repaid, the Irish had to protect and promote their interpretation of U.S. history. To accomplish this, the Irish attacked the pro-British press, which had wielded considerable influence in the mainstream American press for some time. For example, the *Citizen* (Chicago) frequently attacked the *Chicago Tribune* for lacking Americanism because of its failure to support an independent Ireland.

“England’s watch-tower in Chicago” was actually a “quasi-American” newspaper. These “pseudo-American newspapers” were actually “largely responsible for the burning of Irish homes, the shooting of Irish girls, the kidnapping and murder of Irish priests.” They did not display the Americanism of the Founding Fathers, Lincoln, Roosevelt, or the “Americanism that took the shackles off the southern slaves, that freed Cuba from Spanish oppression, that grew indignant over German excesses in Belgium.” This Americanism had to be applied to Ireland too, and Irish-American leaders took it very seriously.<sup>55</sup>

In October 1919, Daniel T. O’Connell and the Irish National Bureau requested that the American press afford them equal space in American newspapers to refute the assertions of Senator John Sharp Williams. Printed in major newspapers nationwide, Senator Williams’ speech attacked “American citizens of Irish blood and the part they have played in the making and upholding of the Republic.” Williams’ statements validated what Joseph O’Connell had said to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell back in 1908. O’Connell has warned, “That the Irish race played a predominating

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<sup>54</sup> O’Brien, *A Hidden Phase of American History*, 386-389.

<sup>55</sup> *Citizen*, December 10, 1920.

part in the establishment of this Republic has not been generally recognized because history has been written by those who had pro-British inclinations.”<sup>56</sup>

As in 1776, the English still sought to win the public opinion battle through a vicious propaganda machine. According to Willard de Lue in the *Irish Press*, British newspapers like the *London Advertiser* fabricated stories meant to cast the American colonists in an unflattering light. Examples included American colonists plotting to murder British officers and Bostonians murdering the Crown’s peaceful messengers. The *Irish Press* accused British papers of reporting on fictitious Irish Republican atrocities in First World War era, too. “The record of the Irish Race entitles it to proper recognition from everybody in America from the Government down to the ordinary citizen, and from the press,” claimed John Devoy. “It is entitled at least to fair play, but it is not getting it. On the contrary, it is getting the worst kind of foul play. There is a vindictive, ruthless campaign of calumny against us in the American press that is utterly without excuse or justification.” The *Gaelic American* ran advertisements for the book *Misinforming a Nation* by Willard Huntington Wright, which was marketed as “A declaration of intellectual independence for those who aspire to an American culture.” The book’s purpose was to illuminate the fallacies in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and its attack on American values due to “the British culture which the Britannica tends to perpetuate.”<sup>57</sup> Irish periodicals and organizations dedicated themselves to promoting the correct version of American history.

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell, Irish National Bureau release, October 22, 1919, Folder 17 (Irish National Bureau Clipping File, August-November 1919), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS; Joseph O’Connell to the Hibernians of Middlesex County in Lowell, Massachusetts, March 16, 1908, Folder OC 126, Box 3, Joseph O’Connell Papers, Burns Library, Boston College.

<sup>57</sup> Willard de Lue in *Irish Press*, May 8, 1920; *Gaelic American*, May 11, 1918; February 2, 1918.

The *Gaelic American* also wanted to disprove the “latest propaganda” from Britain that the British were friendly to the Union during the Civil War. On the contrary, the *Gaelic American* reported that wild cheering permeated Parliament when the Confederate States of America was announced. The British outfitted Confederate blockade runners, which “enabled the Slave Confederacy to hold out for the two last years of the war,” during which time casualties soared. The blood of those who had died in vain was obviously on the paws of the British lion. If anyone deserved American gratitude, it would be the Russians for sending one fleet to San Francisco and another to New York to be at Lincoln’s disposal in case of naval hostilities against England. The article then included a list of quotations from various English newspapers and politicians extolling Southern virtues and proclaiming the Union war effort fruitless. The English press also exaggerated routine military punishments as war crimes. General Butler’s “massacres” in Louisiana, for example, actually consisted of “the military execution of a single Confederate for an outrage to the Federal flag which no commander could have overlooked, while two soldiers, as your correspondent informs us, were executed for maltreatment of the inhabitants.”<sup>58</sup>

The *Gaelic American* claimed that England undermined the Union by lying about American finances in an attempt to destroy their foreign credit during the Civil War. Of course, “no creditor of this Republic ever lost a dollar justly due him, or failed to receive it on the day it was due, and that on the contrary President Jackson was obliged to say to France and Spain, ‘pay up this debt you have been shirking so long instantly, or fight,’ and then they paid; that these were the facts was, of course, of no consequence whatever.” The *Gaelic American* included an anecdote about General Sherman finding

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<sup>58</sup> *Gaelic American*, September 22, 1917; October 27, 1917.

British munitions in Savannah, along with British flags protecting buildings loaded with Southern cotton. The paper also re-printed an April 1867 article from *Donahoe's Magazine* that outlined how England had assisted the Confederacy during the Civil War, including a list of Confederate bondholders in England.<sup>59</sup>

It was imperative for the Irish to dispute those who claimed there was no Irish element in the Continental Army, and the American Irish sought to eradicate these lies from the schools. George L. Fox of the University School in New Haven, Connecticut was a “professional vilifier” of the Irish and their contributions to America. Fox had determined that the Irish made up only 0.105 percent of the American population around the time of the American Revolution, in contrast to the 87 percent with English heritage. Accordingly, Fox claimed that there were no Catholic Irish at the Constitutional Convention and very few around at the time of the Declaration of Independence. Less than five percent of the Continental Army was Irish, and most of them were Protestants, claimed Fox. “There is not the slightest basis for what they (the Irish) did for America,” he claimed.<sup>60</sup>

The Office of the National Secretary warned “the Men and Women of the Irish Race in America” on February 9, 1916 that England was working tirelessly to misrepresent and undermine their efforts to promote the interests of Ireland and America. “We are assailed on all sides by critics who would apologize for the Revolution and make us to all intents and purposes again a...part of the British Empire,” said the statement. Soon after, resolutions followed, including one advocating that “the teachings and practices of Washington and Jefferson, of Jackson and Lincoln may continue to prevail,

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<sup>59</sup> *Gaelic American*, September 29, 1917; August 27, 1921; May 15, 1915.

<sup>60</sup> *Irish World*, May 3, 1919.

to the end that England could not in her various efforts accomplish against America by force she may not now do by guile.” Lincoln had hoped that stories of the American Revolution would last as long as people read the Bible, claimed a March 1922 FOIF *News Letter*, but “he did not anticipate the day when the attempt would be made to blot out the story of that...struggle for liberty from the textbooks of our schools.” According to the *Chicago Citizen*, this was similar to how many Confederate groups (notably the United Confederate Veterans) had introduced resolutions urging the public schools to start teaching public school students that Lincoln had “deliberately plotted” the Civil War. This connected with the British propaganda campaign, as “no action that has any tinge of un-Americanism in it is isolated. Somewhere it connects up with the British propaganda campaign to de-nationalize our country.”<sup>61</sup>

The FOIF National Secretary’s *News Letter* of November 1919, entitled “More English Anti-American Propaganda,” further assailed the British attack on American history. Not only were they trying to erase the Irish but they were trying to expunge the significance of the American Revolution from American history. This English conspiracy centered on distributing “propaganda aimed directly at undermining the basis of faith and pride in the United States and to destroy our belief in American institutions by changing school histories of the American Revolution, distorting facts, apologizing for the actions of the colonials and teaching that American independence was a mistake.”

The flyer pointed to the October 31 Middlesex County Teachers’ Convention as

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<sup>61</sup> “To the Men and Women of the Irish Race in America, February 9, 1916,” Folder 7 (Office of the National Secretary, Record Book), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; FOIF Resolutions, March 4-5, 1916, Folder 7 (Office of the National Secretary – Statement), Box 1, FOIF Papers, AIHS; “That ‘Harmless’ Four-Power Pact,” March 11, 1922, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Citizen*, June 30, 1922.

evidence: “four out of five speakers were British propaganda agents, one a member of Parliament.”<sup>62</sup>

The FOIF *News Letter* of October 1920 claimed that the British attitude toward Ireland’s struggle for freedom “continues to parallel with amazing exactitude the position which she adopted toward the similar situation in America a century and a half ago.” The *News Letter* then quoted British Army historian J.W. Fortesome, who claimed that the American Revolution was mainly the work of a small minority of radicals within the greater indifferent masses. “So have the proponents of oppression argued in all ages and the Englishmen who today blindly assert that the Irish people do not want that liberty which by all the constitutional means in their power they have said they want,” said the flyer, which pointed out that those very same British oppressors were now inheriting “the mantle of those earlier statesmen who less than one hundred and fifty years ago refused to heed the voice of the American people.”<sup>63</sup>

Daniel T. O’Connell sarcastically attacked the frequent Irish-American target and Anglophile Owen Wister for his belief that many Americans harbored resentment toward England because of falsified American history. “It is all a mistake,” O’Connell mockingly stated in a 1920 pamphlet. After all, “George Washington did not win, the Americans did not win.” Since American history “is a joke, it is burlesque” to Owen Wister, it was not surprising that Wister accused the United States of breaking promises to groups such as the Native Americans and turning treaties with them into “a basket of scraps of paper.” Yet somehow Wister only seemed worried about the Germans turning

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<sup>62</sup> “More English Anti-American Propaganda,” November 21, 1919, Folder 8 (National Secretary – *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1919-June 1920), Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>63</sup> “America, 1776 – Ireland, 1920,” October 16, 1920, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

their agreements into “a basket of scraps of paper.” Wister also “attempts to induce Americans to re-write the history of the Civil War on the ground that England was friendly to us then.”<sup>64</sup> Wister’s pro-Britishism made him un-American in Irish eyes.

The Irish attacked famous philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for promoting this un-American new history. In reference to the philanthropist Carnegie, the *Irish World* stated that “The Anglomaniac whose bequeathed millions are now employed to denationalize the teaching in our schools, thus stated in the concluding chapter of his “Triumphant Democracy” the motive back of the “Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.” The preface to the Lake English Classics proffered the myth “that the governmental oppression that caused the American Revolution was ‘made in Germany.’” The American Revolution “was not an attempt of England to tyrannize over colonies, but was a quarrel fomented by a German king as part of his program of despotic ambition,” claimed the book. This was an attempt by Carnegie to “convert American schools into agencies for eventually merging the American Republic into Carnegie’s ‘British-American Union.’” The *Irish World* warned that “The disguised enemies of American nationality have taken the field with a war chest well lined with Carnegie’s millions.”<sup>65</sup> The *Citizen* (Chicago) accused Carnegie and Cecil Rhodes of attempting “to undo the work of the American Revolution,” who were enabled by a lengthy “list of despicable hirelings” that wrote and published these treasonous textbooks.<sup>66</sup>

An April 1920 FOIF meeting established four main purposes for the Irish Victory Fund. In addition to calling on America to stick to its pre-war promises regarding

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel T. O’Connell, “Owen Wister, Advocate of Racial Hatred: an Unpatriotic American who Seeks to Destroy American Traditions,” May 1920, Folder 4 (National Secretary - Pamphlets), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, June 12, 1920.

<sup>65</sup> *Irish World*, November 20, 1920.

<sup>66</sup> *Citizen*, February 10, 1922

national self-determination for small nations, recognition of the Irish Republic and to stay out of the League of Nations, the Irish Victory Fund also existed to “maintain and preserve the American ideals of government and to oppose and offset the British propaganda which is falsifying and misrepresenting the facts of American history.”<sup>67</sup>

Irish-American leaders consistently viewed the situation in Ireland through the lens of American history. When U.S. Admiral William Sowden Sims charged that Sinn Fein was “openly pro-German” and that Sinn Feiners had attacked American soldiers in Cork, Daniel T. O’Connell wrote American Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to address the charges. For years, English propaganda had effectively detached Irish-American citizens from their great historical contributions to the great republic.

“American writers have repeated these misstatements until our history and literature have in part become a tissue of untruths designed to create acrimonious discussion among our citizenry, and break down its solidarity,” wrote O’Connell, “Admiral Sims’ article is another contribution to this cause.” In a familiar refrain, the *Citizen* (Chicago) accused Admiral Sims of being another Benedict Arnold, as his accusations of Irish-American disloyalty had rendered him a “laughingstock.” Sims was a pawn in an elaborate scheme to “sound the praises of our ‘Anglo-Saxon origin,’ and the superiority of that cult in our American population. Does anyone think from her perfidious record towards America

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<sup>67</sup> National Council Minutes, April 16, 1920, Folder 6, Box 8, FOIF Papers, AIHS. De Valera wanted to sell Irish Republican bonds in the United States, but FOIF leaders dragged their feet and ultimately refused to assist the Sinn Fein President. DeValera decided to bypass them and run this operation through his American Commission on Irish Freedom. Cohalan knew that this was illegal under American “blue sky” laws, at least until the United States formally recognized the Irish Republic. De Valera, despite not being well-versed in American law, still branded FOIF as obstructionists – see Dwyer, *De Valera*, 36 and Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 265.

from the days of Washington that England would not try to get her Benedict Arnolds in the service of our country now as she did in the days of the Revolution?”<sup>68</sup>

Many prominent Irish-American newspapers and organizations objected to several school textbooks (and their authors) which chipped away at the achievements of the Irish in American history and at the historical significance of the American Revolution. This was, by proxy, an attack on Irish freedom. The Irish National Bureau, for example, took specific aim at texts they deemed too pro-British, or insufficiently anti-Tory in reference to the American Revolution. The Irish National Bureau attacked Hart's *New American History* textbook in particular. The Bureau compared the Stamp Act and Navigation Acts to similar pieces of legislation in Ireland. The Stamp Act was akin to British domestic taxation, and legislation resembling the Navigation Acts had supposedly destroyed Irish commerce. They charged that the Stamp Act and Navigation Acts received scant attention in the new textbook. Washington did not receive sufficient credit for his role in driving the American Revolution. As it was “incumbent on them [FOIF] to uphold American institutions at all hazard, the question of inscribing the name of Washington over and over again is indeed a pleasure to Irishmen,” the Irish National Bureau challenged “anyone to bringing forward a child taught from this quasi-American history of Hart's and catechize him or her on any of the battles of the Revolution from Bunker Hill to Yorktown and get an intelligible answer.” The Irish National Bureau called for the English apologist to be replaced by “an American, who would not only

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel T. O'Connell to U.S. Naval Secretary Josephus Daniels, November 1, 1919, Irish National Bureau Clipping File, November 1919, Folder 18 (Irish National Bureau, clipping file), Box 20, FOIF Papers, AIHS; *Citizen*, June 17, 1921.

faithfully portray the glorious incidents that culminated in Washington's victory at Yorktown, but would also reflect credit on your Institution."<sup>69</sup>

Irish leaders voiced their concerns with prominent American politicians on the issue as well. For example, Edward F. McSweeney exchanged correspondence with Governor Calvin Coolidge on his concerns about the manner in which American history was being taught to American children. After bring the issue to Coolidge's attention, Coolidge responded by saying that while he appreciated the concern, the U.S. had plenty of societies to celebrate Evacuation Day, Patriots Day, Bunker Hill Day, and Independence Day. In response, McSweeney claimed that the "crowning truth of the American Revolution is today denied by a propaganda which is striving to suppress or distort almost every salient event of the formative period of the American Republic." In fact, instead of teaching these "heroic years" as they really were, they were being taught as "alien interests wish, for the moment, that story had been." McSweeney, in quoting a speech from Senator Albert Beveridge, implored Coolidge to recognize the fact that "no duty is more pressing and vital than that of seeing to it that American history is...taught in every school, college, and university in the land."<sup>70</sup>

Irish leaders denounced the apparent attempt of these textbooks, which was to blame the wrong country for the strife in the American colonies. A schoolbook on American history written by Professor C.H. Ward told the "ridiculous story of the "German king," George III, who alone is accused by Ward to have committed all the

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<sup>69</sup> "Report of the History Committee" on *Hart's New American History*, Folder 4 (Irish National Bureau, clipping file), Box 22, FOIF Papers, AIHS. Bracketed text added.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin Coolidge to Edward F. McSweeney, May 1, 1920, Folder 13 (Edward F. McSweeney correspondence, January-June 1920), Box 10, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS; Edward F. McSweeney to Calvin Coolidge, May 4, 1920, Folder 13 (Edward F. McSweeney correspondence, January-June 1920), Box 10, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

wrong done to America, while the English are ‘entirely blameless.’” These Anglomaniacs were now attempting to show how “the only one responsible for oppression of Ireland and the cruelties inflicted on the Irish people at the present time is the “German king” George V.” Stories about English forts supplying the Hurons, Tuscaroras, and other tribes with five-dollar rewards for scalps was the cause of many Indians invading American territory to “mutilate and murder American women and children.” This “blood money” came from the British Empire’s Treasury, not the “German king” George III, according to the *Irish Press*, which went on to argue that this “bold attempt of Ward and other Anglomaniacs to poison the soul of our children and to tear out of the hearts of American youth the love for their national heroes is doomed to failure.”<sup>71</sup>

Professor Albert Bushnell Hart’s *School History of the United States, Revised*, published by the American Book Company in 1920 was chief among these textbooks that promulgated the de-Americanization of American youth. Hart allegedly blamed Germans for the American Revolution and held that most colonists were proud Britons. He referenced King George’s German ancestry as the basis for this assertion. The *Citizen* (Chicago) called on Irish Americans to “protest against the reconstruction of the history of our country.” These “would-be falsifiers of American history would like Americans of today to eliminate both George Washington and the Fourth of July altogether.”<sup>72</sup>

These school histories glorified the American Loyalists and claimed Washington as an Englishman. Most American soldiers were mercenaries seeking land or other bounties, and the British seizing of American ships after the Revolutionary War was

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<sup>71</sup> *Irish Press*, October 1, 1921.

<sup>72</sup> *Citizen*, July 5, 1918. The mother of King George III was the German-speaking Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg.

justified. Professor Ward had the audacity to say that “George Washington, whom five generations of Americans have regarded as the highest type of American manhood, was not an American but an Englishman.” With “the denial of the Americanism of George Washington there is linked the assertion that there was no reason for the American Revolution,” the *Irish World* said. The passage that blamed the American Revolution on the Germans meant that “young Americans must be imbued with the belief that their country should return to the pre-Revolutionary status of a British province.”<sup>73</sup>

In his section on the Loyalists, Hart (Professor of Government at Harvard University) actually used John Adams’s own calculations in denoting that about one-third of the colonists remained loyal to Great Britain. He noted how the American colonists in 1763 had been proud Britons who considered themselves part of the Great British Empire, which included Great Britain, Ireland, and the other possessions around the globe. “However right and necessary the Revolution was,” wrote Hart, “thousands of good people sincerely loved Great Britain and were loyal to King George. Some of them believed that the British government was the best thing for the colonies,” although Hart also denounced King George III as a narrow, stubborn and poor chief executive. Although these seem like rather benign conclusions regarding the American Revolution, but they did not fit the narrative the Irish were seeking to establish.<sup>74</sup>

Irish-American leaders jumped at the chance to attack authors for any statement or qualification on any Founding Father, Revolutionary hero, or anonymous American colonist that could be construed as negative or un-American. How factual it was did not matter. *A History of the United States for Schools*, written by C. McLaughlin and C.H.

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<sup>74</sup> Albert Bushnell Hart, *School History of the United States* (New York: American Book Company, 1920), 120, 122, 145; *Irish World*, July 16, 1921.

Van Tyne, drew the ire of the *Irish World* for statements they construed as undermining the nostalgic notion of perfect American colonists poisoned by English tyranny. One line asserted that “It is hard for us to realize how ignorant and superstitious were most of the earlier colonists of America.” Another line called Patrick Henry a “gay, unprosperous and hitherto unknown country lawyer.” McLaughlin and Van Tyne had the audacity to quote Alexander Hamilton as saying that the mass of American people were a “great beast.” Perhaps most importantly, a number of important Irish-American heroes were completely omitted, including Commodore John Barry, General Morgan, General Stephen Moylan, General Joseph Reed, General William Irvine, Sergeant William Jasper, Molly Pitcher, and Nathan Hale.<sup>75</sup>

This textbook, written by Andrew McLaughlin of the University of Chicago and Dr. Claude Halstead Van Tyne of the University of Michigan, is a concise volume on American history, checking in at just over 400 relatively small pages, with pictures. As such, the authors tend to brush over major events in American history seemingly due to the constraints of the project, not the desire to write the American Revolution out of U.S. history. For example, the American Revolution received the same number of pages as the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>76</sup>

McLaughlin and Van Tyne’s book supposedly highlighted the valor of the Redcoats as compared to the cowardly, dishonorable American troops. For example, in their brief treatment of the Battle of Lexington, the authors took the opportunity to bash the Americans, saying “Before the smoke of the first volley cleared away the little American band fled, leaving their dying companions.” In glorifying the British assault

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<sup>75</sup> *Irish World*, September 24, 1921.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew C. McLaughlin and Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *A History of the United States for Schools* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911).

on Bunker Hill, the authors betrayed the legacy of the American patriots “in the same insolent manner the glow of enthusiasm and thrill of heroism are dampened and deadened to our children in the account of Bunker Hill.” The McLaughlin and Van Tyne history claimed the Declaration of Independence was largely plagiarized from the writings of Englishman John Locke. They stated that all American political ideas stemmed from the Magna Carta, so there was nothing inherently American about liberty.<sup>77</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Michael J. O’Brien’s take on the Battle of Bunker Hill differed dramatically. O’Brien went through all the Irish colonels and their regiments (from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut) at Bunker Hill, analyzing the surnames to determine the level of Irish participation. He also listed all of the Irish casualties, lists of all Irish officers, and the Irish who deserted from the British Army at Bunker Hill. O’Brien concluded by rejecting those who referred to Protestant Irish as Scotch Irish, as O’Brien argued that they were just as Irish as anyone else from the green isle. He rejected the notion that religion or an English surname necessarily means someone was not Irish. According to David Noel Doyle, O’Brien erred when making these assertions too; the Scotch-Irish “*were* the backbone of Irish participation in the Revolution.”<sup>78</sup>

Attempts to slander the names of American Revolutionary heroes qualified as a dangerous indoctrination of American youth, and it endangered the Irish-American visions for both Ireland and America. “What must the effect be on the opening mind of a young student on reading that John Hancock was a common smuggler – a bootlegger of other days,” wrote the *Irish Press*, or “that Paul Revere or Nathan Hale never existed –

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<sup>77</sup> *Irish World*, September 24, 1921; Charles Grant Miller in *Gaelic American*, January 6, 1923.

<sup>78</sup> Michael J. O’Brien, *The Irish at Bunker Hill: Evidence of Irish Participation in the Battle of 17 June 1775* (Shannon: University of Ireland, 1968); Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 137.

for their names and their fame are omitted from the news histories of the United States? It is time this terrible injection of poison ended.” In actuality, John Hancock was a leading member of the Boston plutocracy during the Revolutionary War era. Hancock’s business empire included wholesaling, warehousing, importing, exporting, shipbuilding, investment banking, and realty. A ruthless businessman, his House of Hancock was the most successful operation in Boston. A notorious penny pincher, Hancock smuggled and bribed customs officials to avoid paying import duties, thus depriving the British government of the revenue they were rightfully owed.<sup>79</sup> These facts worked against the pristine, altruistic Revolution the Irish sought to establish.

The fight against this insidious British plot to hijack true American history was framed as ideologically parallel to their fight against the League of Nations. In reference to these “histories,” (which left out Nathan Hale, called John Hancock a smuggler, and called the Revolution a mistake while lauding the exploits of Benedict Arnold), the *Citizen* called upon all “Irish Americans, AS TRUE AMERICANS” to “declare themselves the custodians of true American history and of true American traditions. Any school board that will dare to permit the introduction of such “histories” into our schools as reflect upon or minimize the glorious deeds of the fathers of the Republic or cast a reflection upon them individually or collectively must be driven from power. We must lead in this fight as we did in that of the infamous league of nations. The people will surely follow as they did then.”<sup>80</sup>

The *Irish Press* incredulously noted that Everett Barnes had blamed the American Revolution on political miscalculations. Barnes called it a shame that Whig errors led to

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<sup>79</sup> *Irish Press*, March 11, 1922; Harlow Giles Unger, *John Hancock: Merchant King and American Patriot* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Citizen*, August 26, 1921.

the disseveration of the American colonies from the British Empire. He stated in his book that the American Revolution was not as simple as pitting the English versus the Americans but rather “between the Tories and the Whigs on both sides of the sea, neighbor against neighbor.” Barnes lamented that the Whig Party in England had been unable to stand up to the King and convince him of his “foolish course,” for that may have prevented the Revolutionary War. “Had there been no war, this great country would probably now have been a great branch of the British Empire,” concluded Barnes.<sup>81</sup>

Barnes also painted the Continental Congress, several Founding Fathers, and war heroes in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 in dark colors, portraying Americans as selfish, power-hungry, and incompetent (which were English and not American traits). He called the body a “scene of petty bickerings and schemings, through which single Colonies sought to make gains for themselves. In that Congress were selfish, unworthy, short-sighted, narrow-minded, office-seeking and office-trading plotters.” John Hancock was a “smuggler, and so had been his father,” while John Paul Jones’s great victory at Serapis was “due not to Paul Jones’ brilliant fighting, but to an accident to his enemy.” Barnes blamed the outbreak of the War of 1812 on “some hot-blooded young statesman from the Southern States,” among whom were American heroes Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. He justified the 1814 burning of Washington on the basis that the Americans had burned some public buildings in Canada. In “sneering” remarks, he minimized and undermined the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans. Arguing that all the Americans had to do was maintain

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<sup>81</sup> *Irish World*, September 24, 1921.

their ground to win, Barnes offered “detailed apologies for the British defeat and praise of British courage” in this “wasted” and “needless” incident.<sup>82</sup>

Barnes actually blamed the outbreak of the Revolutionary War on King George, who was a corrupt power-hungry tyrant who usurped Parliamentary authority and bought off political opponents with cash and offers of political office. Barnes did praise the “stout-heartedness” of John Paul Jones, claiming that he was far outmatched by his opponents’ vessel but his courage carried the day. Barnes also had the audacity to call the Battle of New Orleans “needless” because the Treaty of Ghent ending the war had already been signed.<sup>83</sup>

Professor C.H. Ward had the impudence to argue that “taxation without representation” contained no inherent “injustice or oppression” and “few people in England suspected there was anything momentous about the Stamp Act.” Ward believed that the “American Revolution marked no epoch in the advance of liberty.” The *Irish World* accused Ward of attempting to make the Founding Fathers look “ridiculous in waging a war against oppression when no oppression existed. In this view, how can the Declaration of Independence appear other than as an absurdity?” Professor John P. O’Hara’s *School History of the United States* failed to mention the Boston Massacre and dismissed the Boston Tea Party as “lawless destruction of property!”<sup>84</sup>

The *Irish World* quoted New York Mayor John Francis Hylan in calling this “new” American History “anti-American propaganda.” The paper urged other leaders to follow Hylan’s lead “in the patriotic work of keeping the minds of the youth of the land

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<sup>82</sup> *Irish World*, September 24, 1921.

<sup>83</sup> Everett Barnes, *American History for the Grammar Grades* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1920), 186-187, 218, 261-262.

<sup>84</sup> *Irish World*, September 24, 1921.

from being poisoned by pro-British propaganda. A campaign for denationalizing the next generation of Americans is on. All who take pride in America and American institutions should fight it unrelentingly. Drive pro-British text books from our schools.” The *Irish World* proclaimed the debilitation of American nationalism in stating “It is fortunate that the underhand attempt at Anglicizing the next generation of Americans by means of un-American school histories has been exposed in time to prevent the process of denationalization which would have been the outcome of the success of this attempt.” The fate of American national identity was at stake. “There is now evidence in abundance that there is a deliberate conspiracy to imbue the minds of the pupils of our public schools with views of historical events which would make these boys and girls less American in sentiment than are their fathers and mothers,” said the paper.<sup>85</sup>

The article went on to praise the Boston City Council for banning Helen Nicolay’s “Book of American Wars” from the shelves of the Boston Public Library. Nicolay’s book “is a fair sample of the pro-British stuff pro-British propagandists rely upon to carry out their un-American program.” The book’s chief aims were “discrediting the principal actors in the American Revolution as well as the Revolution itself.” It described Samuel Adams as a “ne’er do well” deadbeat who relied on his wife to provide for him and trashed James Otis, who resigned from his office as Advocate General, as that “great incendiary of New England.” Patrick Henry was called “a slovenly, fiddle-playing incompetent with an odd gift of oratory, who had been slow at his studies and had failed twice at clerking and once as a farmer before he decided to practice law.” According to the paper, “The motive back of this characterization is plain. What is written of Samuel Adams, James Otis and Patrick Henry is intended to disparage them

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<sup>85</sup> *Irish World*, December 17, 1921; October 21, 1922.

with a view to discredit indirectly the cause they championed.” Since that cause was identical to the contemporary Irish cause, they were slandering both. By calling attention to Carnegie and others who were trying to re-link the United States with the British Empire, the Boston City Council had “rendered a distinct service to the cause of Americanism.” Of course, Samuel Adams did indeed experience a wealth of financial problems throughout his life, as his motivations seemed more ideological than financial. His egalitarianism shined through when he said, “I glory in being what the World calls, a poor Man. If my Mind has ever been tinctured with Envy, the Rich and the Great have not been objects.” For obvious reasons, the Irish did not promote his English and Puritan heritage or his anti-Catholicism.<sup>86</sup>

The *Gaelic American* asserted that the private schools in New York had come under the control of “English propagandists.” The paper claimed that “Fairy tales of England’s virtues, greatness and goodness are dinned into the ears of the impressionable American youngsters until they become more English than the English themselves.” This “foreign control of the private schools saps the Americanism of impressionable youngsters who may be our future Presidents, Senators, Congressmen, Mayors, or Governors.” The irony of it was that those who questioned the loyalty of hyphenated Americans were attacking the truest Americans. “Many of the men and women whose children are being de-Americanized in the British-staffed schools are decrying hyphenated Americans and taking on themselves the self-imposed task of Americanizing the foreign-born citizens and their children,” decried the *Gaelic American*, making the

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<sup>86</sup> *Irish World*, October 21, 1922; Ira Stoll, *Samuel Adams: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 61, 237-238.

point that “The children of the foreign-born citizens at least attend American schools and are taught by American teachers.”<sup>87</sup>

The *Gaelic American* touted the report of Joseph T. Griffin (Principal of New York public school No. 114) in accusing these authors of enervating American History. The goal of this “emasculatation of American history” was to “minimize the glorious deeds of the Fathers of the Republic and to treat the War of the Revolution as a very unimportant and trivial matter. It is sought to impress on American youngsters that they have no stirring traditions and to kill their feeling of pride in the great struggle that ended England’s stranglehold on America” said the paper. In showing their belief in universal Americanism, the paper continued, “The attempt to belittle the most important event in the history of this country, an event that has had a worldwide influence on the welfare of mankind – the attempt to befog that event requires amazing audacity.”<sup>88</sup>

After highlighting these pro-Tory biases of the textbooks by Barnes and McLaughlin & Van Tyne, the *Gaelic American* analyzed the differences between the *Barnes Primary History of the United States*, published in 1886, and the new 1920 *Barnes American History in Grammar Grades*. The latter was firmly in the “new American history” camp the Irish so loathed. On the subject of the Navigation Acts, the newer book minimized the “oppression caused by the Navigation Laws.” The author was clearly making an effort “to create in the student’s mind a doubt as to the just grievances which the colonies felt when the Navigation Laws were enforced.” In contrast to the

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<sup>87</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 7, 1921.

<sup>88</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921.

older book, the newer book “never calls us Americans” but rather “Englishmen in America” in discussing the causes of the Revolution.<sup>89</sup>

The new book ignored the Boston Massacre and painted the various colonies as having selfish motives as opposed to patriotic ones. The new book emphasized the disadvantages the British faced at Lexington as a result of the terrain, and British valor had replaced American valor in the newer book’s discussion of what happened at Bunker Hill. The newer book de-emphasized the importance of key American victories like Ticonderoga, and the American failure at Quebec is noted without the qualifying the loss with a discussion of the “extenuating circumstances” that the Americans faced. Whereas the old book told the story of the foot soldiers at Valley Forge refusing good pay to switch sides and General Reed stating that the King of Great Britain lacked sufficient funds to purchase his services, the newer version left such patriotic deeds out of the narrative.<sup>90</sup>

The more recent version implied that America had joined forces with France and Spain, as opposed to those nations joining the Revolutionary War in progress. This fresh version attributed John Paul Jones’s great sea victory over the *Serapis* to an accidental explosion aboard the British ship crippling her fighting capabilities, not to the skill of Jones and the valor of the Americans. The newer book also claimed that Charles Lee (the British soldier who famously switched sides and served as a general in the Continental Army), and not Benedict Arnold, was the greatest patriot traitor. In addition, it claimed that Congress had mistreated Arnold, thus “making a martyr of Arnold in the minds of children.” Whereas the old book mentioned Anthony Wayne and his great American

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<sup>89</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921.

<sup>90</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921.

triumph at the Battle of Stony Point, the newer book omitted the story. The book implied that all the people in the south were Loyalists and belittled American war heroes (and British adversaries) Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens as the leaders of “roving bands.”<sup>91</sup>

The book included only a “half-hearted” discussion of Yorktown and ultimate American victory. It emphasized how a Southern minority forced the U.S. into the War of 1812 and that American seamen received higher wages than did their English counterparts. The older book detailed Perry’s victory on Lake Erie, but the newer one neglected to include the story or Perry’s famous message to General Harrison: “We have met the enemy and they are ours.” Whereas the old book called the burning of Washington an atrocity, the newer book claimed it was justified in light of Americans burning some buildings in Canada early in the war. The newer book also de-emphasized Jackson’s victory at New Orleans, claiming that it was a “wasted battle” that the Americans needed only to show up at to win.<sup>92</sup>

Dr. Joseph T. Griffin called this “treason against American tradition,” and while he agreed that cordial relations between the nations was a good idea, he wondered “is it necessary for Americans to change their national history in order to keep English friendship?” Griffin closed by making a joke which tied the American Revolution to contemporary times: “The allegation that the Revolutionary War was fought against a

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<sup>91</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921.

<sup>92</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921.

German King on an English throne is no more true than that the World War was fought against an English Kaiser on a German throne,” said Griffin.<sup>93</sup>

A May 1922 FOIF *News Letter*, discussing this pamphlet by Griffin, posed the following question: “Must American History be re-written to preserve our foreign friendships?” The pamphlet professed that the American war heroes of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 must continue to be celebrated and that the pamphlet should be used “as a guide to red-blooded Americans with the moral fibre [sic] strong enough to believe and insist that American History, crimsoned with the blood of our martyrs, shall be maintained in its entirety and shall be elaborated upon by those authors who, as Americans, still believe in the magnificent structure which the forefathers of this Republic have reared and which must endure.”<sup>94</sup>

In June 1922, the FOIF *News Letter* implored readers that more and not less devotion to the study of the American Revolution was necessary. “I would prefer to see the story of those heroic days told over and over again,” said the author, so that the younger generations of Americans would “catch this heroic inspiration and imbibe something of the sturdy manhood of those days. I want a truly American history – one which will help us build up our common country and give us an American mind, an American purpose, and American ideals.”<sup>95</sup>

The emasculation movement had started with Professor Goldwin Smith, who in a series of pamphlets, books, and articles had “found credence with the shallow and

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<sup>93</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 28, 1921. The *Citizen* ran a story on Griffin’s assault on fabricated British history in the May 5, 1922 issue. Charles Lee was a British soldier turned Virginia planter who fought on the patriotic side in the Revolutionary War.

<sup>94</sup> “Religious Persecution in Ulster,” May 27, 1922, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>95</sup> “Rattling the Bones,” June 3, 1922, Folder 1 (National Secretary, *News Letter of the Irish National Bureau*, July 1920-June 1921), Box 5, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

unthinking professors and teachers who had become a curse to genuine education and a menace to virile Americanism.” The “pigmy historians who have not any of the qualifications of the historian must not be allowed to mislead young Americans,” claimed the vociferously anti-English paper. American liberty owed nothing to England. “The Americans looking for a model of government could find nothing that would appeal to liberty-loving people in the English constitution,” read the *Gaelic American*. “The public must take this important question in hand and by the force of public opinion reestablish Americanism in our schools make a public bonfire of the books belittling our country and expose and punish the British propagandists, native and foreign, who would dare to pollute the nurseries of American patriotism.” Charles Grant Miller argued that all this “new” American History simply sought to distort and modify “many of the vital facts of the Revolution and the War of 1812 and even in relation to England’s attitude during the Civil War.” It was necessary to have a “restoration and preservation of the heroic old American history teaching to our children tart Americanism and instilling patriotism, not flunkeyism.”<sup>96</sup>

Irish periodicals vaguely threatened legal action over how U.S. history was taught. The *Gaelic American* wondered how the “minimizing of every thrilling event in American history and the slurring of every cherished American historical personage in the text books on history now in use in our schools demand the attention of every real American who is proud of his heritage” had not attracted the attention of lawmakers trying to root out political influence in public school instruction. The paper called on the Meyer Committee to investigate the Board of Education for sanctioning “anti-American, American scribes” from writing school histories. The *New York World* had “taken its

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<sup>96</sup> *Gaelic American*, September 3, 1921; *Irish World*, September 24, 1921.

stand on the side of the pro-English propagandists” by questioning why school books needed to be written from a pro-Irish or pro-labor point of view. The *Gaelic American* shot back “Who is asking that American history be written from any angle but that of truth? Why not write the text book on American history from the American point of view?”<sup>97</sup>

In a familiar refrain, the *Gaelic American* compared these anti-American forces to the most infamous American traitor: “The soul of Benedict Arnold still survives in the treason to American traditions which pollutes many recently revised text books in use in our public schools.” Professor Edward Almiron Greenlaw’s *Builders of Democracy* had the audacity to claim that the American Revolution was part of a larger struggle for free government and not directed against the English nation but just the English government. Americans were related to the English both ethnically and civically, as English and American political ideals were the same. While Charles Grant Miller agreed that it could be constituted as good English history, it was nevertheless bad American history and most definitely not suited for “Americanization, but for de-Americanization – worse yet, Briticization [sic].” The stated purpose of Dr. Greenlaw’s (a Professor of English at the University of North Carolina) book was to “find what great men – poets, statesmen, citizens – have said about the ideals for which America entered the great world war. The book is thus a means by which we may learn what it is to be a good American citizen.” It was meant to be a general history of the ideals of freedom and their American embodiment, not necessarily a thorough history of the American Revolution. As such, it included a selection of poems by Walt Whitman, speeches of American presidents like

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<sup>97</sup> *Gaelic American*, September 10, 1921.

Lincoln and Wilson, Washington's acceptance as commander-in-chief, and the story of Beowulf.<sup>98</sup>

In Boston's parochial schools, American history received much attention. Catholic schools perpetuated the idolization of American heroes like Washington and Lincoln and ordered students to salute the flag each day so as to "stimulate patriotism." Believing that public school texts were ignoring the Catholic contribution to American history, the parochial school instructors in Boston familiarized students with the exploits of Christopher Columbus, the Jesuits, Hernando de Soto, Marquis de Lafayette, fighting John Barry, and Archbishop John Hughes, whose death was often described as a pivotal moment in U.S. history. Only half-hearted apologies were proffered for the Spanish (and others) treatment of American Indians, and African Americans were seen merely as Sambos. The Knights of Columbus held an American history contest, with the goal being to produce an American history free of propaganda: "the plain tale of America."<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

Irish-American historians, politicians, and editors worked consciously throughout this era to cultivate the image that they were more American than any group in the country. To a large extent, they did this by constantly expressing their participation in the American Revolution and by continuation, expressing reverence and hero-worship for

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Grant Miller in *Gaelic American*, February 4, 1922; Edward Almiron Greenlaw, *Builders of Democracy* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1918), ix-xii, 9.

<sup>99</sup> Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845-1917* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1983), 68-71; *Pilot*, September 17, 1921. Archbishop John Hughes was a key figure for New York Catholics during the Civil War era. He was no abolitionist, but he hated the institution of slavery (though he mocked abolitionists while the archdiocese held the *Metropolitan Record* as its official organ early in the war) and defended Lincoln's conscription (he was humiliated by the New York City draft riots). Hughes accompanied Thurlow Weed to Europe in 1861-1862 in an attempt to assure France did not recognize the Confederacy. He died in 1864 – see John R.G. Hassard, *Life of John Hughes, First Archbishop of New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 434, 448-449, 484-485.

all American Founding Fathers and American ideals. Their version of history was crucial to how they made the case for Irish freedom. The noble Founding Fathers would have wanted the United States to pursue Irish freedom. America was an idea that should be applied to all places struggling to be free. The people of Ireland faced the same enemy in 1920 as the Americans had in 1776, and the same principles applied.

The ownership and control of the narrative of American history in schools became a key battleground due to the overwhelming importance it held in shaping their worldview. If the Irish view of the American Revolution was not widely accepted by Americans, then Ireland did not stand a chance. The American Revolution had to be applied to Ireland. Thus, its supposed de-emphasis in school textbooks greatly alarmed the Irish. They launched a war to preserve their pristine version of the founders' motives and they insisted that Irish Catholics had played a pivotal role in the great American victory. In doing so, they demonstrated the power of propaganda and the special place the American Revolution holds for all peoples in the world.

**CHAPTER VIII – “LONG BEFORE I HAD LANDED IN AMERICA I WAS TRULY AMERICAN, AND I THINK THAT IS NOT UNTRUE OF MANY”**

During both the Civil War and the First World War, Irish Americans faced challenges to their Americanism. They were newcomers, a “foreign” element in a country dominated by an exclusive WASP culture and politics; xenophobia and nativism marked each era. In both cases, Irish-American leaders came to oppose the current war effort. This opposition was further complicated by the troubling tendency for American leaders (and citizens) to repress wartime dissent. Faced with this seemingly untenable situation, the Irish *used* American history and their notions of what constituted “un-Americanism” to fit their predicament.

In each case, the Irish faced a nativist backlash against them. WASPs attacked their Popish religion, divided national loyalties, provincial politics, and heathen culture as un-American. This was exacerbated by their opposition to the American war efforts. The Irish sought to overcome these distinctions and “become Americans,” but the wars provided nativists with additional ammunition against the Irish. The United States has long suffered from discrimination against the legitimacy of immigrants as American citizens and prejudice against those who have spoke out against American wars. The Irish in these two eras had to combat both. Nativists could more easily fire charges of disloyalty at foreigners during these politically-charged wartime eras. The loyalty and American patriotism of the Irish were on trial, and they had to walk a thin line in defending their Americanism. They had to make the case that their dissent against the American war effort was actually patriotic.

The Irish almost universally belonged to the Democratic Party during the 1860s. They despised Lincoln and the Republicans, especially after the Civil War became a war for black freedom. Irish enlistments plummeted after the alarming casualty rates suffered by the Irish Brigade at Antietam and Fredericksburg. The Emancipation Proclamation did not help. Irish newspapers that had previously supported the fight to preserve the Union criticized it as a war to free the slaves. They claimed Lincoln was a power-hungry tyrant and that a war to militarily coerce states back into a country they did not want to re-join constituted un-American behavior.

The Irish felt that being an American was a choice. If an immigrant wanted to be an American, they should be granted full American citizenship immediately. The same went for states. If Southern states foolishly wanted to leave the Union, they should be allowed to do so. By the same token, they should be allowed to re-join after the war was over. Any Reconstruction requirements, regardless of how seemingly obvious they might be, were viewed as un-American. These sentiments coalesced into an Irish-American universalism. "America" was a construction vaguely equated with "freedom," and anyone who loved and desired freedom was an American. Where one lived mattered not.

Irish leaders hoped that the First World War would provide the distraction necessary to divert British attention and allow for an autonomous Irish Republic to form. Rooting for (and conspiring with, in a couple cases) the Germans in hopes that the First World War would provide the catalyst necessary for burgeoning Irish Republican movement to succeed, the Irish again found themselves on the wrong side of an American war effort. Their dissent intensified after President Wilson stubbornly pressed for American admittance into a League of Nations that classified Ireland as a domestic

British issue. Again, these Irish leaders loosely associated “America” with “freedom” and claimed that anyone, anywhere could be an American. An American universalism again permeated the Irish community, but now it was applied more directly to Ireland than ever before.

During the Civil War and First World War eras, Irish leaders attempted to construct an Irish-American sensibility steeped in their perceived contributions to American history and their construction of the “un-American.” Their circumstances and political ends had changed by the First World War, but Irish leaders pursued similar strategies in fortifying and promulgating their Americanism. During both the American Civil War and the First World War, prominent Irish-American leaders dissented from the administration’s policies. In each case, they represented a faction of the American populace that was deemed by many to be foreign and un-American. These accusations were particularly poignant because of their opposition to the war effort. In each case, the Irish used “America” to combat these assertions. They used the idea of “America” to argue that they were in fact the most American citizens in the country, and they did this in two primary ways.

First, the Irish defined themselves against “the other,” which was un-American. They accused political opponents of being un-American and claimed that the Irish embodied the true American qualities. They considered America to be a universal concept. It meant freedom everywhere for everyone. Anyone who wanted to be an American should be afforded the opportunity to become an American. American citizenship was a catholic concept. Nativism, the English concept of subjecthood, and an overreaching federal government were the principle tenets of un-Americanism during the

Civil War. The Irish then accused the Republican Party of basically being a nativist, English, and overreaching political entity. They felt that it was the Republicans who were un-American and not them.

During the First World War, they again proclaimed that their political adversaries were un-American. They still considered America a cosmopolitan idea, but by the First World War era, the theatre had changed. Instead of using American universalism to justify full citizenship for Irish Americans, they wanted to apply it to the people in Ireland. It was time for the United States to use its wherewithal to apply American principles to Ireland. Being an American meant fighting for the implementation of American-style democracy in Ireland. Therefore, anyone who hindered Irish freedom was un-American. Woodrow Wilson and his League of Nations were the principle targets of this Irish outcry. To give these arguments more teeth, however, they needed to better define their American credentials. To do so, the Irish used their interpretation and memory of American history, particularly the American Revolution.

During both time periods, they tried to project an image of staunch Americanism by alluding to their contributions to American history, including (and perhaps, most importantly) American wars. To distance themselves from accusations of disloyalty or unpatriotic behaviors, the Irish actively marketed their contributions to the founding and maintenance of the American Republic. During the Civil War era, they were fighting for acceptance into American society and viewed the country as a sanctuary. As a result, they promoted their contributions as payback for American sanctuary from starvation. Their politics often conflicted with those of the wartime administration, however. To reconcile their desire for acceptance with their opposition politics, they used the words of

the Founding Fathers, notably Jefferson and Washington. In applying Jefferson's and Washington's blessing to their political beliefs, the Irish hoped to become American during a war which they opposed.

By the First World War and its aftermath, the Irish had made significant inroads into mainstream American society. Nativism still existed, of course, but the Irish position within the country had changed. Their use of American history also changed to fit the contours of the new debate. The Irish used Washington's Farewell Address to argue that the United States should stay out of the war and then out of the League of Nations, but this was a selective isolationism. They vehemently contended that the United States should use its newfound clout in the world community to free Ireland after the war. The American Irish paraded their patriotic contributions throughout American history for all to see. They claimed that the Founding Fathers (especially Washington) loved the Irish above all others and wanted Ireland to be free. They asserted that the Irish had done more to free the United States from Britain than had any other group, and they insisted that the exact same battle was being fought in Ireland. A battle over American history itself ensued, with the Irish launching a full-scale assault on anyone who questioned their role in the American Revolution or who doubted their rather poignant views on its origins and relative importance. After all, their hopes for Ireland as well as their own American identity hung in the balance.

For these Irish leaders, "America" was an idea. They proclaimed that "America" was freedom and hope. "America" was a frame of mind, a decision, and a way of life. The Irish were Americans and always had been. They argued that the Irish were *both* ethnically and civically the most American of all citizens. As an ethnic group, they had

done more for the establishment and maintenance of the United States of America than had any other people. And the freedom-loving Irish people had been fighting for their own liberty since before America had been discovered. As such, the Irish had been Americans since before there were Americans. Denis Aloysius McCarthy had summed this up perfectly at a November 1915 meeting of the Charitable Irish Society in Boston. “One of the first lessons I received in American patriotism,” he said, was that “I was in America because long before I had landed in America I was truly American, and I think that is not untrue of many.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Aloysius McCarthy, speech transcribed in “Meeting Minutes,” November 15, 1915, Folder 4, Box 2, CIS Records, Burns Library, Boston College.

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