

RE-IMAGINING THE IMAGINARY: A CHALLENGE TO REVISIONIST MYTHOLOGY¹

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"Re-Imagining Ireland" is nothing new. For centuries the Irish and others have contested the "facts" and interpretations of Ireland's troubled history, interrogating "what it means" and has meant to be "Irish" at home or abroad. Contemporary Irish historians, like their predecessors, have played a major supportive role in the "re-imagining" process. From the 1930s and especially since the 1960s, their dominant paradigm has been "Revisionism."² Allegedly blessed with unbiased, "value-free" perspectives and armed with new "scientific" methodologies, Revisionists have claimed to write "objective" history. Their efforts have been prodigious: they have uncovered new evidence, illuminated experiences of hitherto neglected groups, and "imagined" novel and challenging ways of understanding Ireland's past.

The Revisionists' main objective, however, has been to deconstruct, destabilize, and expel from the realms of "responsible" discourse (public as well as academic) what they condemn as the "dangerous myths" of Irish Nationalist history: that is, the "traditional" accounts and interpretations of Conquest and Resistance that allegedly fostered the Easter Rebellion of 1916, the Irish Revolutionary and Civil wars of 1919-23, the sociocultural and political inadequacies of independent Ireland, and, especially, the recent "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Indeed, one wag suggests that Revisionists, if miraculously granted the opportunity to prevent just *one* occurrence in the Irish past, would choose the Easter Rising rather than the Conquest, the Famine, or Partition. Compromised by that agenda, Revisionist scholarship often seems scarcely more "objective" than the much-maligned "old-fashioned" Nationalist history it has largely supplanted.

No history, popular or professional, Nationalist or Revisionist, is "value-free," but rather is conditioned, consciously or unconsciously, by the historians' political culture: by the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and academic hierarchies – the prevailing systems of rewards and punishments – in which they function. As Fintan O'Toole suggests provocatively, one of the independent Irish state's greatest failures was that, out of parsimony or philistinism, from the 1920s it failed to co-opt most of Ireland's young intellectuals into the state's "founding" Nationalist and Catholic mythologies, thus alienating and obliging them to seek nourishment from other sources that

1 This essay originally appeared in a slightly different form in *Re-Imagining Ireland: Transformations of Identity in a Global Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006) and is reproduced here by permission of the publisher.

2 The most balanced survey of revisionism is Brady, *Interpreting Irish History*. My thanks to colleague Ted Koditschek for his invaluable comments on early drafts of this essay.

were contemptuous of those mythologies and/or of the new state itself (95-96). Yet complicating O'Toole's analysis is that after 1921 the Irish state's leaders and apologists were themselves necessarily ambivalent towards at least some Nationalist mythologies, as in the wake of Partition and Civil War the logic and emotive power of Thirty-Two County Republicanism threatened "from within" the new state's stability and legitimacy.

The 1960s, however, marked the Irish establishment's critical if long-disguised break with traditional Nationalism. The state's abandonment of autarchic Sinn Féin economic policies for total immersion in an international "free market" controlled by Anglo-American financial and corporate capitalism – coupled with the explosion of Northern Ireland's smoldering conflict – persuaded most Irish academics to embrace new socioeconomic and historical mythologies better suited to the needs of the Globalized, Post-Nationalist future which, Dublin's politicians and pundits now promised, would bring Ireland the economic prosperity, social stability, and political closure which the old faiths had failed to deliver.

Revisionist interpretations of Irish history generally reflect this convergence of Neoliberal economic and of (allegedly) Post-Nationalist political perspectives.³ Indeed, historical Revisionism is somewhat akin to that Neoliberal project, Privatization. Both strip "property" (material or cultural) from national, public ownership or common understanding and entrust it to privileged, "cosmopolitan" élites. Both purport to be objective, inevitable processes that liberate individuals from the stultifying effects of "mistaken" past policies and understandings. Both appropriate liberal or humanistic terms and values – concerning individual "freedom," "dignity," and "agency," for instance, to condemn the alleged dangers of "paternalism," "dependency culture," or "victimization history." Yet both subvert such terms to validate new forms of economic and cultural domination – and *old* forms as well: for just as Privatization's apostles ignore its consequent inequities of wealth and power, Revisionists (despite their Post-Nationalist pose) rarely critique British Nationalism or Ulster Unionism with the vigor and asperity they apply to Irish Nationalism. Finally, both impose degrees of legal, structural, or philosophical conformity designed to preclude policy-reversal or intellectual challenge.

Thus, just as the ascendancy of Neoliberalism has constricted public debate on contemporary socioeconomic and political questions, so the hegemony of Revisionism has restricted research or marginalized alternative perspectives on many critical issues in Irish history. Yet Revisionism itself needs to be deconstructed and its basic assumptions denied their mystifying authority – not only to restore a healthy equilibrium to Irish historical scholarship, but perhaps also to help Ireland's inhabitants

3 Revisionism is not ideologically homogeneous; its practitioners include a few Marxist-Unionist and some devoutly Catholic "traditionalist" scholars, but for different reasons they share the Neoliberals' aversion to the Irish Nationalism of Tone, Mitchel, Pearse, and Connolly.

"re-imagine" a more coherent vision of themselves, their past, present, and possible future. In the remainder of this paper, therefore, and drawing largely on my own research, I propose to interrogate Revisionist interpretations of three historical issues of contemporary importance: first, Ulster Protestant identities; second, the causes and consequences of Irish migration; third and finally, Irish relationships, past and present, with empire and imperialism.

Ulster's Protestants: Only "Two Traditions?"

In Ireland, historically and currently, questions of ethnoreligious or "national" identities invariably have political connotations. Unfortunately, the prevailing Revisionist model of Irish ethnic identities and relationships – the "Two Traditions" paradigm – is deficient. The term suggests the paramount and permanent existence of only two Irish groups whose adherents have totally distinct historical experiences, antagonistic political cultures, and conflicting material interests. One group is characterized as Gaelic, Catholic, Nationalist, and "Irish"; the other as English/Scottish, Protestant, Unionist, and "British."

The Two Traditions paradigm does not promote full understanding of the Irish *past*. By merely substituting a two-traditions model for the old unitary Nationalist one, Revisionists have failed to grasp the complexity they normally celebrate. Ironically, in the guise of "pluralism" the Two Traditions paradigm simply reifies what Frank Wright calls the Ulster Protestants' "settler ideology" as well as the "natives'" Manichean analogue (20 and *passim*). Consequently, the binary model ignores or de-emphasizes similarities, common interests, and instances of cooperation between Protestants and Catholics, and it ahistorically homogenizes both Traditions, slighting the diversity, complexity, and sociocultural and (among Protestants) denominational conflicts within each group. And although the Two Traditions paradigm purportedly illuminates *cultural* distinctions, its concept of culture is limited: culture is conceived as an independent variable, divorced from socioeconomic and other contexts; and culture and cultural conflicts are "naturalized" as virtually primordial and eternal.

In fact, ethnic cultures and identities are impermanent, situational, contingent on ever-changing historical and environmental factors. Among them, demographic factors are crucial but are often ignored, although between the early 1700s and early 1900s dramatic population changes surely conditioned the development of Irish Protestant identities. For example, between 1732 and 1911 the proportion of Ireland's Protestants who lived *inside* the future twenty-six-county Irish state fell from nearly 51 to less than 29 percent, primarily because in the 1700s, long before the rise of modern Irish Catholic Nationalism, southern Ireland's Protestant communities began to decline precipitously, largely due to high emigration rates that exceeded those among Ulster's Protestants. As a result, by 1911 the six counties of the future Northern Ireland contained almost three-fourths of the island's Protestants. Equally

important, between 1831 and 1911 the Protestant proportion of those six counties' inhabitants rose from 57 to 67 percent, and yet between the early 1700s and the early 1900s the *Presbyterians'* share of that region's Protestants fell from at least three-fifths to less than half. The sociocultural and political implications of these and other demographic changes were surely momentous – for the rise and fall of 18th-century Irish Protestant Nationalism, for instance, or for the subsequent consolidation of Ulster Unionism.

The Two Traditions paradigm is equally unhelpful for understanding *contemporary* Northern Ireland. Instead, the Two Traditions model may be a prescription for eternal sociocultural and political partition in Northern Ireland and between it and the rest of the island. For example, the paradigm's most recent elaboration, by those promoting a pan-Protestant "Ulster Scots" identity, only historicizes and exacerbates ethno-religious polarization by implicitly denying all associations with "Ireland" and the "Irish." Moreover, in its common usage that term erases from historical consciousness the large and important body of northern Anglicans, primarily of English descent, who are subsumed in an "Ulster Scots" hegemony which in turn logically implies Presbyterian primacy in the North's sociocultural and political history. Yet, as we have seen, during the last three hundred years Ulster's Protestant population has steadily become *less* Presbyterian, from over 60 percent in the early 1700s to less than 40 percent by 1971. Crucially, it was the Ulster Presbyterians whose disputatious political culture – once the bane of Anglican bishops, landlords, and officials – was subsumed in the zealous monarchism and Tory conservatism that traditionally characterized Ulster's Anglicans – as well as in the latter's most distinctive institution, the Loyal Orange Order.

For the past half-century Revisionist historians have "re-imagined" the Irish Nationalist Tradition – subjecting it to intense analysis, exposing its contextual nature, its ambiguities, contradictions, contingencies, and inadequacies. However, the re-imagining process must be impartial if relationships in Northern Ireland, and between northern Protestants and the inhabitants of the rest of the island, are to achieve peaceful and constructive resolution. If the interrogation and deconstruction of Irish Nationalist "mythologies" are healthy, valuable exercises, then it would be fair and salutary to interrogate and deconstruct those of Ulster Unionism as well.

In the 1790s the United Irishmen asked if Irish Protestants and Catholics were forever condemned "to walk like beasts of prey over fields which [their] ancestors stained with blood" (Curtin 21). Ironically, one "field" that members of the Two Traditions might explore mutually and profitably is the Great Famine of 1845-52, perhaps in the process discovering that historically they have more in common than hitherto imagined. Of course, the Famine's traditional interpretations appear to corroborate a Manichean view of Irish history. In Nationalist mythology the Famine confirms the malevolent nature of the Union with Britain and the rapacious character of the Protestant landlord class. In Unionist mythology there was no Famine in "Protestant Ulster,"

because God spared his Chosen People to reward their fidelity to the Union and their sociocultural and moral superiority to Ireland's "feckless" and "disloyal" Catholics.

And yet, between 1831 and 1861 Ulster's Presbyterian and Catholic populations declined by nearly identical rates – by eighteen and by nineteen percent, respectively. It was the Famine-era experience of Ulster's *Anglicans* that was exceptional, for their numbers fell merely thirteen percent in the same period. Patronage from an overwhelmingly Anglican landlord class and magistracy, membership in Ireland's legally privileged church, and fellowship in the Loyal Orange Order (then still predominantly Anglican): all these may have sheltered poor communicants of the Church of Ireland from the pressures that starved or exiled poor Presbyterians and Catholics.

Local studies discover even more remarkable patterns. Between 1841 and 1851, for instance, the population of ten contiguous overwhelmingly Protestant and heavily Presbyterian parishes in mid- and east-County Antrim declined overall by more than one-seventh, and losses in several parishes were comparable to those in west Munster and Connacht: 21 percent in Glenwhirry parish, 24 percent in Raloo, and an appalling 36 percent in Kilwaughter.

It is vital to remember that, when Kilwaughter's Presbyterian cottiers and other poor Ulster Protestants died of hunger or famine fever, suffered eviction, or migrated to the disease-ridden slums of Belfast or of cities overseas, their fates were determined not by members of the "other Tradition" – by their "ancient Catholic foes" – but instead by Protestant landlords, officials, merchant-creditors, head-tenants, and employers: in short, by Ulster's upper and middle classes, whose members mythologized the Famine as devoid of Protestant suffering and, a few decades later, mobilized the North's poor Protestants to defend a Union and a socioreligious hierarchy that had signally failed to protect many of their ancestors from destruction and dispossession.

In early 1848, John Mitchel, a Protestant Irish Nationalist from Newry, County Down, published his "Letters to the Protestant Farmers, Labourers, and Artisans" of Ulster, urging them to join Ireland's Catholics in revolution against a Government and a landlord class which, he argued, were responsible for the "Great Hunger."⁴ However, Ulster Protestants' political culture, as it had evolved since 1798, allowed for neither a Nationalist nor a class-based interpretation of the Famine experience, as between 1798 and the 1840s a combination of socioeconomic, religious, and political factors (not least the massive emigration of disaffected Presbyterians) had largely eradicated among northern Protestants the ecumenical Nationalism of the United Irishmen – creating instead a pervasive loyalty to the Union and its upper- and middle-class Protestant champions.

4 Mitchel's "Letters" first appeared in his Dublin newspaper, *The United Irishman*, in spring 1848; in 1917 they were republished as *An Ulsterman For Ireland*.

As a result, Ulster Protestant victims of hunger, evictions, and parsimonious relief could not express their pain, grievances, and resentments within the context of a hegemonic religious and political culture that denied their very existence. We must recover their long-suppressed voices. In the process we may learn that the Two Traditions paradigm offers no more infallible guide to Ireland's future than it does to Ulster's past. Perhaps a critical perspective may discover or "re-imagine" other, conflicting "traditions" – one or more of which may provide better guideposts to a brighter future than the perpetual polarization and partition to which the Revisionist model would consign us.⁵

Irish Migration: "Exile" or "Opportunity"?

At its peak in 1845 the Irish population was about 8.5 million. Remarkably, between 1600 and 2000 roughly the same number of Ireland's inhabitants emigrated. Yet if Ireland has been an "emigrant nursery" (see Mac Laughlin), to a lesser degree it also has been a migrants' destination: for the Celts in prehistoric times, for Vikings and Normans in the Middle Ages, and for 250,000 to 400,000 Protestant settlers, principally English and Scots, between the 1500s and the early 1700s. In recent years perhaps 100,000 "new immigrants" and refugees, primarily from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia, have come to Ireland. Thus, Ireland's people have for centuries been familiar with what is now called Globalization, as geography and history placed their island at the Atlantic crossroads of the emergent Anglo-American economic and political empires.⁶

Despite that long familiarity, however, the "story" of Irish emigration has always been contested. The interpretations of its causes, character, and consequences have long been subjects of controversy for the Irish in Ireland, for the non-Irish members of the "host societies" overseas, and for the emigrants and their descendants in the far-flung Irish Diaspora. Contending "meanings" and disputed "lessons" of Irish emigration have emerged from debate both among and within these groups. Invariably the results of these contentions – the voices and interpretations that became dominant – reflected the interests and outlooks of those classes that enjoyed the greatest social and cultural authority. Put simply, the "meaning" of Irish migration was and is a profoundly political question, inextricably related to power relationships in Ireland and in the Diaspora.

5 The 1831-61 demographic data are described and interpreted in greater detail in Miller, "The Famine's Scars." On similar discrepancies between Ulster Presbyterian and Anglican growth and out-migration rates in 1766-1831, see Miller et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, 656-77. For elaborations of the arguments in this essay, see Miller, "Ulster Presbyterians and the 'Two Traditions'," and "Forging the 'Protestant Way of Life'."

6 My research on transatlantic Irish migration is set forth in numerous publications, especially in *Emigrants and Exiles* and *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*.

For example, Ireland's own "possessing classes" (Lee 376, 390, and *passim*) have always "explained" Irish emigration in ways that buttressed their sociocultural and political hegemony – often in conflict with variant interpretations advanced by representatives of subordinate groups. This was true even in the 1720s, when Ulster Presbyterian clergymen described their people's migration in starkly religious and political terms – as flight to a New World "Canaan" from "Egyptian bondage" to rack-renting landlords and persecuting Anglicans. By contrast, Irish magistrates and ministers of the legally established Church dismissed Scots-Irish grievances as "imaginary" and insisted their departures were due merely to personal ambitions or "strange humours."

Likewise, during the nineteenth century British officials usually contended that Irish emigration was natural and beneficial – the inevitable result of free-market forces – whereas Irish and Irish-American Nationalists argued that emigration was at root involuntary "exile" caused by poverty and famine, which in turn were the results of British misgovernment and landlord oppression. Much evidence, historical and contemporary, served to corroborate the Nationalist interpretation, as in the minds of Irish Catholic country-people the conquests, confiscations, and persecutions of the past merged seamlessly with *An Gorta Mór* and the wholesale evictions that occurred during that and other crises. Of course, the Nationalists' interpretation of emigration-as-exile caused by political malevolence served to mobilize the Irish at home and abroad against British rule and landlordism. Yet it also *de*-mobilized the impoverished masses in Ireland and overseas, for it obscured the socioeconomic and cultural conflicts between them and the Irish and Diasporan middle classes, whose economic, religious, and political enterprises benefited immeasurably from the departure (or, overseas, from the arrival) of Ireland's dispossessed.

For instance, the wealth of Ireland's "strong farmers" and graziers often derived from the fields and flocks of their evicted and emigrated neighbors, while the former's security against reprisals was ensured by the mass departures of disgruntled peasants. Likewise, the Catholic Church's influence at home was strengthened both by the disappearance of lower-class, non-practicing Catholics and by remittances from the faithful overseas, while the Church's expansion abroad was based largely on the Diaspora's increasing size and wealth. Finally, emigration ensured that in Ireland *bourgeois* Nationalists were rarely threatened by class conflict, whereas the great numbers of Irish overseas enabled both Diasporan Nationalists and ordinary ethnic "machine" politicians to build and fund successful organizations.

In the early twentieth century the semi-official Irish Catholic interpretation of emigration-as-exile, caused solely by British/landlord tyranny, remained pervasive – despite occasional objections from socialists such as James Connolly, and although logically it soon became untenable, since after 1921 it was the Catholic *bourgeoisie*, empowered by Irish independence, that proved unwilling or unable to stem mass migration. From the late 1950s, however, Irish politicians and economists formulated

new strategies to attract massive foreign investment and create an export-based, high-tech economy fully integrated into a U.S.-controlled, transnational capitalism. Ideally, they promised, the consequent prosperity would halt and even reverse the tide of emigration. But when departures soared again in the economically troubled late 1970s, 1980s, and early to mid-1990s, Dublin's political establishment hastened to excuse and even encourage the new exodus, both to reduce welfare costs and to protect their new economic order from social and political upheaval. In turn, the establishment's Neoliberal and Revisionist intellectuals produced new interpretations of Irish emigration.

In the new dispensation, historic and contemporary Irish migrations no longer were viewed in negative, communal, or nationalistic terms. No longer was the Irish emigrant a homesick "victim" of British misgovernment or a vengeful "exile" whose "atavistic" Nationalism might destabilize Anglo-Irish relations or lend support to Northern Irish Republicans. Nor was emigration interpreted as resulting from systemic inequalities *within* Catholic Irish society or from the regional imbalances and social inadequacies of the Globalization process itself. Rather, in an ironic echo of nineteenth-century British voices, Irish emigration became the natural result of politically uncontrollable yet ultimately benign "market forces" operating on "a small island." The Irish emigrant was now portrayed as either a fortunate escapee from a repressively "traditional" Catholic Ireland, still blighted by *its own* perverse failure to fully embrace capitalist modernity, or, more commonly, as a confident, ambitious, adaptable individual who – after a few years of certain success abroad, honing entrepreneurial skills in Los Angeles, London, or another "world city" – would return to help indoctrinate Irish society and culture in the techniques and outlooks of global capitalism.

Thus, with emigration as with the Two Traditions, Revisionists merely substituted one monolithic explanation ("opportunity") for another ("exile"). And the new explanation serves the same function as the old, for the Neoliberal interpretation of Irish emigration promotes what Ireland's governing classes call "social stability" by "explaining" all departures, past and present, as the product of voluntary, individualistic, rational, market-based decisions, rather than as the result of flawed policies or social inequalities that might be susceptible to political solutions. Of course, the rapacity of the "Celtic Tiger" inevitably generates new examples of "uneven development," and these may stimulate mass migration in the future as in the past. But whether that would generate challenges to the dominant, depoliticized interpretation of Irish emigration is problematic. Mary Robinson's "Light for the Diaspora" may still burn in the Irish presidential residence, but the recent closure of the Republic's *only* center for Irish migration studies (at University College Cork) may be a more accurate reflection of the Irish élite's real attitude toward those it formerly eulogized as "Mother Ireland's Banished Children."

The Irish: "Imperialists" or "Rebels"?

The notion of an "Irish Empire" overseas, recently advanced by historians, filmmakers, and journalists,⁷ at least partly reflects the same political impulses driving Revisionist interpretations of Irish migration and Nationalism. Apparently, the revision of Irish migration demands more than its divestment of traditional, communal, and Nationalist connotations, or its "normalization" as modern, individualistic, and market-driven. It also requires its conceptual relocation in the matrix of British Imperialism, specifically, and of Western (or "white") military, economic, and cultural conquest, colonization, and exploitation of native peoples in the Americas, Australasia, Asia, and Africa, generally.

Revisionist logic is simple: if the Irish Catholic experience abroad can be re-interpreted as one of wholesale and enthusiastic participation in British and American imperial and colonial adventures and in genocidal assaults on dark-skinned peoples (as well as in the Catholic Church's offensives against indigenous cultures), then the "exceptionalist" assumptions that underpin traditional Irish identity and Nationalism – and the latter's alleged affinities with Third World suffering and resistance – can be fatally discredited.⁸

Of course, evidence exists to corroborate the Revisionists' image of Irish migrants and their descendants as racist and imperialist. Although Daniel O'Connell provided an authentically "Irish" language of anti-slavery and anti-racism, most of his countrymen overseas rejected his injunctions. Indeed, Irish-Americans may have played pivotal (if subaltern) roles in the construction of racial hierarchy in the U.S., their efforts to gain acceptance and advantage by "becoming white" expressed through urban politics, trade union practices, policing, and race riots.⁹ Likewise, during the nineteenth century, in India and elsewhere, Irish Catholics often comprised a disproportionate number of ordinary soldiers in the British Army overseas – as also in the U.S. Army on the western frontier and in the Spanish-American War. In short, many Irish responded as members of oppressed groups often do when they encounter others even lower in status or more vulnerable than themselves.

Yet the Revisionists' basic assumptions are confused and faulty. To the degree those assumptions are Neoliberal, stressing individual volition or "choice" (as in the emi-

7 E.g., in addition to the documentary film "The Irish Empire" (1998), see Jeffrey, ed., *An Irish Empire?* and "Part Three: The Empire" of Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora*. To be sure, the authors of the essays in these works vary in their assessments of the Irish Empire concept.

8 To be fair, some who employ an Irish Empire concept have a different project: to challenge the complacency and insularity of many Irish and Irish-Americans by summoning them not to abandon Nationalist or anti-imperialist ideals but to extend their application beyond mere rhetoric and their own communal experience.

9 See Ignatiev and Roediger, but these scholars are ideologically worlds apart from Neoliberal Revisionists who seek to discount the radical and internationalist aspects of Irish Nationalism.

gration-as-opportunity thesis), they fail to recognize that attitudes and behavior regarding race and imperialism, like those respecting ethnic or national identity, are socially constructed as well as situational and contingent.

Irish Catholic migrants overseas (and especially in the U.S. and British armies) encountered social structures, legal systems, and hegemonic cultures that were already hierarchical and often deeply discriminatory. Their own "alien" or "undesirable" characteristics – as Irish, Catholic, working-class, impoverished, and often Irish-speaking – posed major obstacles to employment or even sufferance in what were often highly insecure, ruthlessly competitive, and even trenchantly hostile environments. Few migrants enjoyed wealth, power, or incentives sufficient to do aught but adapt to their host societies' basic "rules." In the process of adaptation, moreover, most migrants created and relied heavily on their own familial, social, and cultural-religious networks, which in themselves also promoted ethnically exclusive (and perforce "white") attitudes and behavior.

Enmeshed in such circumstances, it was not surprising that Irish migrants usually internalized and demonstrated loyalty to both their host society's and their own sub-society's reinforcing conventions, particularly when it seemed both "natural" and in their material and political interests to do so – *and* also when failure to do so threatened to incur economic deprivation, social stigma, and even legal punishment. A wholesale Irish rejection of American slavery, for example, likely would have generated – and probably institutionalized permanently – a nativist backlash far more powerful than the "Know-Nothing" movement. These are not "excuses" but merely sad and almost inescapable realities.

However, the Irish Empire thesis is at least equally flawed to the degree that, paradoxically, its underlying assumptions are also (as in the Two Traditions model) homogenizing and essentialist. Indeed, the thesis implies a kind of "racial" essentialism: the "Irish" were "white" and therefore must always have formed a part (however subordinate) of the "master race" and its thrust to global empire. Yet it is revealing that Revisionists often can sustain the Irish Empire thesis only by ignoring their otherwise beloved Two Traditions paradigm. Indeed, sometimes they willfully conflate the identities of Irish Catholics and Protestants abroad – obscuring key distinctions among those they lump indiscriminately together as "Irish" – in order to imply that the former's allegedly hyper-"collaborationist" record overseas belies Nationalist analogies between the historical experiences of Ireland's Catholics and of the dark-skinned subjects of "real" colonial exploitation in the Anglo-American empires.

However, the distinctions that Revisionists thereby slight were real and important. For example, it was Scots-Irish Presbyterians, not Irish Catholics, who, if simply by chronological precedence and sheer numbers, perpetrated most of the "Irish" violence against Native Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the same circumstantial reasons, it was the Scots- and Anglo-Irish in the U.S. who comprised the great majority of the "Irish" who practiced slavery and legalized white

supremacy in their crucial, formative periods. Further, it was Anglo-Irish Protestants, not Irish Catholics, whose status and connections enabled them to constitute the overwhelming majority of the "Irish" officers in the British Army overseas, the British East India Company, and the British colonial administrations and police forces. Thus, to the degree that it *is* legitimate to speak of an "Irish Empire" abroad, it was an Empire dominated, not by Irish Catholic Nationalists, but by Irish Protestants – and, in the British colonies, principally by wealthy and privileged Irish Protestants, that is, by the same kinds of people who dominated Ireland itself.

The point of this argument is not to invert the political implications of the Two Traditions paradigm. Irish Catholic migrants were not morally "superior" to, or more "innocent" than, Irish Protestants. It was primarily factors such as timing, class, and circumstance that implicated many of the latter more broadly or deeply than their Catholic countrymen in imperialist and racist systems abroad. It may be that Irish Protestants could transpose a "settler ideology" overseas – and colonial governors frequently re-"planted" them in frontier regions precisely because of that belief. However, Catholic Ireland's conquest and colonization – and the elaborate systems of rewards and punishments thereby imposed – also inevitably generated emulative and even collaborationist responses. Likewise, poverty, ambition, and the need to please no doubt fostered adaptation to dominant systems and outlooks that promised acceptance, opportunity, even privilege, to migrants longing to escape from customary deprivation and proscription.

Nevertheless, Revisionist advocates of an Irish Empire ignore much contradictory evidence. That evidence suggests that – because of a complex of sociocultural, political, and psychological factors, rooted in their own legacies of resistance to conquest and colonization – individuals of Irish Catholic birth or descent (along with some Irish Protestants who shared similar burdens and perspectives) may indeed have been disproportionately prone – relative to other "British" migrants – to interact with native or subject peoples overseas on comparatively equal terms, to empathize with their plight, and even to support their struggles for liberation.

For example, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Irish and Irish-American Nationalist newspapers almost invariably applauded "native" uprisings against British colonialism, and the Irish-American press strongly criticized U.S. imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines. Many Irishmen of Gaelic or Old English origins – such as William Johnson in early eighteenth-century New York, R.R. Madden in mid-nineteenth-century Cuba and Western Australia, and "His Majesty [David] O'Keefe" in early-twentieth-century Micronesia – were unusually successful in mediating sympathetically between native and imperial, traditional and capitalist societies and cultures. Remarkably, the records of almost every major slave revolt in the Anglo-American world – from the West Indian uprisings in the late 1600s to the plot discovered on the Civil War's eve in Natchez, Mississippi – were marked by real or purported Irish participation or instigation. Even Frederick Douglass, a bitter critic of Irish-American

racism, related how Irish laborers in Baltimore offered to help him escape from slavery.

In class and national conflicts, the evidence of disproportionate "Irish" (often including Protestant, especially Presbyterian) migrant participation in protest, radicalism, and rebellion is even greater and more varied. Transatlantic examples range from the "London hanged," the Nore and Spithead mutinies, the Democratic-Republican Societies, and the Whiskey Insurrection of the 1700s, through the Latin American revolutions and the activities of the Chartists, the Molly Maguires, and the Knights of Labor in the 1800s. In Australia notorious Irish involvement in sociopolitical unrest extends from the convict rebellions of the early 1800s to the Eureka Stockade in 1854, from the legendary exploits of bush-rangers like Ned Kelly to the dockland radicalism of the early 1900s. In New Zealand, even the Maori uprisings were reputed to have support from disgruntled Irish Catholic immigrants, as were the Canadian rebellions of 1837 and later of Louis Riel.

Much Irish involvement in such activities is incontrovertible, but much must be qualified by words like "alleged," "rumored," or "reputed." Yet this is one instance in which *reputation* is as important as reality. Reports of "Irish" insubordination, unrest, conspiracy, and rebellion generally originated among governing officials and conservatives – lay and clerical, the latter Catholic as well as Protestant, many of whom were often Irish themselves. These men felt they had ample reasons to fear what they perceived as perennial "Irish" dangers to hierarchy and empire. Conservatives such as Boston's John Adams, for example, saw inevitable threats to "law and order" from the "motley rabble of . . . Irish teagues," whom he blamed (alongside "saucy boys, negroes and molottoes . . . and outlandish jack tars") for the "mobs" that in 1770 precipitated the Boston Massacre.¹⁰

In the late 1700s such allegations were legion. Influenced by American, French, and Irish radicalism, many Protestant as well as Catholic Irish, at home and in the New World, embraced a broadly and politically "Irish" identity that embodied for them (and for their adversaries) dreams (or nightmares) of political revolution, social upheaval, and personal liberation. Sadly, of course, in 1798 the United Irish Rising failed, and the "Age of Revolution" soon became one of political and religious reaction and repression. In Ireland most Protestants fled to the shelters of Unionism, of evangelicalism, and/or of America, while most Catholics gravitated to "faith and fatherland" movements that were narrowly sectarian and *bourgeois*-controlled. In the U.S. conservatives posed a modernized "Scotch-Irish" ethnicity as an exclusively Protestant,

10 Adams cited in Young 96-97. Revealingly, the "Irish" killed in the Boston Massacre (Caldwell and Carr) were men who later would be called "Scotch-Irish." For Adams and other Anglo-American conservatives, it was not religion that marginalized and stigmatized such people as "Irish Teagues" or "Wild Irish," but rather their poverty, "subversive" ideas, and "insubordinate" behavior.

socially "respectable," and politically "safe" alternative to the formerly ecumenical and ultra-democratic connotations of "Irishness."¹¹

Contrary to the Revisionists, however, it was not the much-maligned Irish Nationalists of the 19th and early 20th centuries who first constructed the image of Ireland's Catholics (and their former Protestant allies) as inveterate rebels against political and social authority. Rather, it was earlier Protestant (and Catholic) conservatives and counter-revolutionaries, for whom "essential" (or "Wild") "Irishness" seemed the inveterate enemy of the hierarchical systems, deferential habits, and genteel norms that maintained the prevailing, unequal distributions of rights, property, and power. Perhaps the Irish Empire thesis appeals to those who wish today's Irish to acknowledge and fulfill their allegedly imperialist legacy. But much evidence suggests that a once extensive "Irish *Anti-Empire*" – "When 'Irish' Meant 'Freedom'" – might provide more fruitful themes for historical inquiry as well as for popular inspiration.

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11 See Miller et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, especially the Introduction, the chapters in Part VII, and the Epilogue.

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