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Failing to 'unite with the abolitionists': the Irish Nationalist Press and U.S. emancipation

David T. Gleeson

ABSTRACT

Daniel O'Connell was an acknowledged leader of the anti-slavery movement in the 1830s and 1840s. To American abolitionists, he embodied an Irish opposition to slavery. Yet, many, such as Frederick Douglass, saw a contrast between the Irish in Ireland and those in America when it came to the issue of slavery. The Irish in America were among the most ardent opponents of abolitionism. An examination of some of the leading nationalist newspapers opinion of the American Civil War and emancipation indicate that contrast between the Irish abroad and at home on the slavery question is exaggerated. Influential Irish opinion makers had a racial sense of Irishness which trumped O'Connell's universalist call for emancipation.

In his last autobiography, Frederick Douglass wrote that 'No transatlantic states-man bore a testimony more marked and telling against the crime and curse of slavery than did Daniel O'Connell.' Noting that not long after he saw him 'his health broke down and his career ended in death', Douglass continued, 'I felt that a great champion of freedom had fallen and the cause of the American slave, not less than the cause of his country, had met with a great loss.'[1] As the recent works of Christine Kinealy and Bruce Nelson have shown, O'Connell was indeed one of the strongest advocates of abolition in the Atlantic World of the 1830s and 1840s and also a supporter of black equality.[2] From an Irish per-spective, his most famous advocacy came in 1842 with the 'Address from the People of Ireland To Their Countrymen and Countrywomen in America!' Written by members of the Hibernian Antislavery Society, James Haughton, Richard Allen and Richard Davis Webb, O'Connell adopted and endorsed the address. He used his mass membership Repeal Association, dedicated to the repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland, to gather a reported 60,000 supporting signatures. The 'Address' was carried to America by African-Amer-ican abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond, where abolitionists led by William

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Lloyd Garrison orchestrated its public reading in Faneuil Hall, Boston. The Address explicitly condemned American slavery and called on all the Irish in America to 'treat the colored people as your equals, as brethren'. Irish immigrants were also ordered 'TO UNITE WITH THE ABOLITIONISTS' and to 'cling by them' at all costs because 'Slavery is a sin against God and man. All who are not for it must be against it. None can be neutral.'[3]

In reality, however, the response of the Irish in America was very negative. O'Connell had been their hero, yet many who had supported his campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland virulently opposed his call to 'stand by the Abolitionists'. Ultimately, Irish Americans broke with him on the issue, especially when he threatened to support British opposition to the American annexation of Texas in 1845 on explicitly anti-slavery grounds.[4] Why did they oppose him so emphatically, and turn their backs on the abolitionist appeals of the 'Liberator'? Some scholars explain the Irish-American stance on slavery as motivated by the pursuit of whiteness. Noel Ignatiev, for example, explains the paradoxical attitude of the Irish who 'became white' as a quick realisation that they would have to disassociate themselves from O'Connell's anti-slavery principles in order to prosper in America.[5] In a more deeply researched work, Bruce Nelson agrees that to

> ask Irish immigrants to 'treat the colored people as your equals, as brethren' was to ask them to go directly against the American white supremacist racial grain, to link them even more closely with a despised and powerless race, to condemn them to the margins of the society they had chosen as their home.

There were, he argues, 'pressures that pushed Irish immigrants toward the holy grail of white identity'.[6] These pressures included the Democratic Party and the Catholic Church, with the former's loud and avid, and the latter's quieter but tacit support for slavery and black inequality, encouraging Irish immigrants to becomes the slavery supporters Douglass knew in America, rather than to retain the abolition sympathies that characterised the Irish in Ireland.[7] From his arrival there in 1845, Douglass propagated the view of Ireland as the perfect abolitionist country. In the 1880s, he still felt confident writing that the 'Irish … at home readily sympathise with the oppressed everywhere'. If the 'Irish American' followed Ireland's rather than America's example, then he too, Douglass hoped, might change and 'realize his mistake', and 'find out that in assuming our [African American's] avocation he is also assuming his own degradation'.[8]

The Irish seem very passive in Douglass's late commentary, which almost argues that they arrived, in racial terms, as blank slates onto which American racial mores could be written: simply put, they were taught how to be racist in America. William Lloyd Garrison, however, grew very pessimistic about the Irish in America in the wake of their poor reaction to O'Connell's call, explaining

their opposition to abolition as the result of their Irish political interests rather than their relation to American and Irish-American circumstances. Garrison believed that they

> were wholly engrossed with their one idea of 'Repeal', and did not seem able to comprehend how the warmest love for the oppressed of Ireland was compatible with sympathy for the oppressed of all other climes, especially for the three millions of manacled slaves in the South.[9]

That Irish-American beliefs were deeply nationalist rather than universalist grievously disappointed Garrison. His explanation of their attitudes then is not of rootless immigrants searching for an identity in a new country, but of a group with a strong and enduring sense of Irishness that demanded restoration of the national parliament in Ireland. Garrison's complaint was not that the Irish in America had embraced an American sense of whiteness, but that they had developed a particular obsession with the Repeal cause, which curtailed their political engagement with abolitionism. They privileged their own 'national' cause above all others.

This link between Irishness and nationalism had implications for Irish attitudes towards slavery both during O'Connell's time and in the decades after his death. O'Connell's initial views on slavery had been met with sympathy (or at least a lack of hostility) from those close to him in the Repeal movement, but, after his death, his supporters drifted from his call to embrace abolitionism. When the American Civil War broke out in 1861, following the secession of 11southern states in defence of their interests in slave property, Irish nationalist opinion had a huge opportunity to acknowledge O'Connell's anti-slavery legacy. At first, those closest to his nationalist politics seemed to do so. John Francis Maguire was the son of a merchant and a moderate Catholic nationalist in the O'Connellite tradition. An attorney, he was variously a Member of Parliament for Dungarvan (County Waterford) and Cork city. In 1851 he founded the newspaper the *Cork Examiner* as a vehicle for his parliamentary aspirations, and to represent the mercantile interests of the growing Cork Catholic middle class. Maguire's initial view of the secession movement after South Carolina seceded was oppositional: he was 'against the seceders and southerners because slavery is at the root of their principles', and claimed that as '[friends] to liberty, we are shocked at the existence in America of so foul a blot upon its name as that of negro slavery'.[10] The comments reflect the O'Connellite beliefs to which he still fully subscribed when it came to Irish politics. Yet, as the war progressed, Maguire became more critical of the Federal government, and particularly Abraham Lincoln, and thus more sympathetic to the Confederacy. This shift was based partly on distrust of the Republican Party and of Lincoln, attacked by Maguire in his opening editorial on secession as the 'bigoted' and 'illiberal' Americans 'who inscribe "abolition" on their banner'.[11] In the 1850s, anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant Know Nothing Republicans had sought to

restrict the rights of the Irish immigrants to the United States, and during 1860 there had been a serious though unsuccessful attempt to include an anti-immigrant plank in the Republican Party platform.[12] Maguire also feared for the fate of the Irish in America whom, he considered, a war over slavery and secession could harm disproportionally, warning – even before major combat operations – that because there were such large numbers of Irish people in America (almost 2 million in 1860), the 'American War touches Ireland more nearly than any other country in the World.'[13]

Maguire had declared slavery as his reason for opposing the South's secession, but his ambivalence towards the Republican Congress and the Lincoln administration as they moved towards emancipation in the summer and autumn of 1862 grew.[14] As early as September 1861, referring to General John C. Fremont's military order ending slavery in Missouri the previous month, Maguire complained that 'the abolition party [Fremont had been the Republican candidate for president in 1856] with the recklessness of cruelty which only humanity mongers know, are striving to raise a servile insurrection. The next step', he continued in an alarmed tone, 'will be to arm the slaves',[15] in an attack on what he saw as the hypocrisy of professional abolitionists who claimed to be for liberty yet were now encouraging murder. Maguire then turned on the hypocrisy of the United States' attempt to abolish chattel slavery: 'Nothing could be more ludicrous, than the contrast between the theoretical freedom of the United States and the practical terrorism now exercised to compel unanimity of opinion.' Coming perilously close to excusing the enslavement of African Americans on racial grounds, he argued that the

> existence of slavery used to be the great standing reproach to the boasted equality of the States, but to this there was a sort of reply in the necessity for forced labour in climates where the soil could only be tilled by the unwilling African race.[16]

Another potential defence for the continued existence of race-based slavery aside from the absence of any alternative to an enslaved African-American workforce, according to Maguire, was that Americans could point to 'the white slaves of European countries, where *men of the highest race* [my emphasis] were practically obliged to maintain a humility scarcely differing from the negro'. The 'freedom' of these 'men of the highest race' had, in America, 'become as liable to question as that of the slave',[17] because Irish men, among the most likely, as Democrats, to be critics of the war, were also liable to arrest and detention following the Lincoln administration's suspension of Habeas Corpus.

Maguire's shift in attitude towards American slavery was reflected beyond the pages of his popular newspaper. During the Civil War, Maguire published his biography of the famous Cork-based temperance advocate Father Theobald Mathew (1790–1856), whose anti-alcohol crusade he had supported.[18] Maguire's biography mostly covered the priest's travelling campaigns to have thousands 'take the [abstinence] pledge', but also had to address

Mathew's controversial relationship with American slavery because it had been a major issue in Mathew's famous tour to the United States in 1849/1850. Mathew was a friend of O'Connell and had signed the 1842 petition calling on Irish Americans to 'stand by' the abolitionists. In Boston, in the early stages of his American tour, Mathew was visited by William Lloyd Garrison, and asked to publicly re-endorse the famous petition. When Mathew refused to do so because he planned a major trip through the South, Garrison denounced him in the *Liberator* for his failure to follow O'Connell's strident anti-slavery example. Following this public rebuke, the story went national, with some southerners even objecting to Mathew's proposed visit because of his signing of the original petition. Senator Henry Clay's invitation to Mathew to visit the floor of the U.S. Senate also drew controversy when other southern senators put forward a resolution to withdraw it. The resolution failed because the majority of senators, and most of his hosts in the South (he proselytised in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas without incident), accepted his statement that it was not his intention to interfere with 'the domestic institutions' of the United States during his trip.[19]

Maguire began this section of Mathew's biography by blaming the whole affair on 'the unthinking zeal' and 'partisanship' of the abolitionists. He defended Mathew's failure to follow his original conscience because

> Father Mathew did not visit America to achieve the emancipation of the negro, but to advocate and promote the cause of temperance; and any attempt to play the part of the abolitionist would have been in bad taste and in worse judgement.

Of course, Maguire added, Mathew still 'rejoiced' in the freeing of slaves, but he had been in America to 'save' the 'thousands of his *own race* [my emphasis] of countrymen, who in the cities of the South, were the victims of a more deadly slavery' and in light of that 'he resolved that no word should drop from his mouth which could prevent him from coming to their rescue, and effecting their freedom'.[20] Again, Maguire downplayed the horrors of chattel slavery, comparing it as less dangerous to life and limb than drunkenness, and he emphasised the plight of the Irish over that of African Americans.

The biography appeared in 1864 and by then Maguire was a firm critic of emancipation. For example, Maguire declared President Lincoln's first step toward abolition, the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, to be 'utterly contemptible' and likely to bring about 'servile insurrection'. He believed that the 'horrors of slavery would be tenfold increased by such a mode of attaining freedom advocated by President Lincoln' because

> in the numerous localities of the South which, owing to the exigencies of the war, must now be left almost entirely unguarded by whites, it is but too much to be feared that that this proclamation will work with deadly effect.

Through the war and up until Lincoln's assassination in 1865, Maguire, despite claims of neutrality in the American conflict, became a cheerleader for the Confederacy, celebrating its victories and downplaying those of the North. He saw Confederate victories, rather than Federal ones, as a way to end the war quickly, with this, in the process, resulting in the preservation of slavery.[21]

Maguire was the only Irish nationalist to proclaim an initial abhorrence of slavery but then exhibit pro-Confederate attitudes, especially around attempts to end slavery. Other moderate nationalists also disliked the Emancipation Proclamation, including Sir John Gray (sometimes spelled Grey), Liberal MP and, like Maguire, editor of one of the most prominent newspapers in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, the Dublin *Freeman's Journal*, founded in 1763. Gray, an Anglican, took control of the paper in 1841 and made it a strong advocate of O'Connell's Repeal movement. He also supported disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland because it taxed the majority Catholic population to support a Church they did not attend. The *Journal*'s circulation was among the highest in the country and highly influential beyond that because of its high readership among the clergy.[22]

The *Journal* had been even stronger in supporting the Federal government over the secessionists in 1861 than the *Examiner*, deriding South Carolina and other southern states' 'pretensions to independent sovereignty'. Gray, a fierce admirer of O'Connell and a critic of slavery, pointed out the economic backwardness of the South when compared to the North, and described the 'peculiar institution' as a 'moral evil'.[23] Yet even Gray betrayed some sneaking respect for the Confederates observing at one point that 'though we have no sympathy with the South, we cannot but admire the consistency, the boldness, and the lofty tone of its leaders'.[24] This admiration contrasted with O'Connell's unmitigated description of slavery supporters as 'faithless miscreants'.[25] Nonetheless, in 1861 Gray advised that the North should make the war about slavery and in the process gain 'Europe's sympathy'.[26] When Emancipation finally became Federal policy in late 1862–early 1863, Gray's position seemed more radical than Lincoln's, considering it mealy that only those slaves in rebel-controlled territory and not under Federal control in states such as Kentucky and Maryland had been freed. Yet throughout 1863, even though the war had shifted to one of liberation, he talked up the Confederacy, even claiming, after the devastating defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, that the South deserved victory. Ultimately, an immediate end to the war, and the emancipation that now went with it would result in 'a smaller republic with peace' that was better 'than a larger republic with war debt'.[27] Compromise trumped the fight for the liberty of enslaved African Americans.

Gray also became susceptible to racial arguments. War fatigue on his part, it seems, eventually overcame the impetus to end the 'moral evil' of slavery. Gray and other leaders of Irish nationalist opinion became tired of the reports of casualties, especially among Irish units in the Union army, who were, as one

put it 'shedding their blood for an alien cause'.[28] This fatigue may have been what led him to republish reports from anti-Emancipation newspapers in the northern states. In September 1863, for example, the *Journal* reprinted an article from the *New York Caucasian,* a title taken in 1861 in opposition to the war being raged by the 'Black Republicans'. The *Caucasian* article, entitled 'Buying, Flogging, and Shooting White Men', claimed that Federal Army Provost Marshalls were forcing poor white men into the army to fight the 'Abolition War'. Those who refused were flogged, beaten up and even shot. One case in particular was intended to resonate with Irish readers in New York and, with Gray's decision to reprint this piece in Ireland. According to the *Caucasian*, 'the other day, a black wretch, called a soldier, shot an Irish labourer in Philadelphia. The coroner's jury brought a verdict against the negro, but the colonel of the regiment overruled the verdict referring it to the War Department'. Since the regiment had now left Philadelphia 'the murderer had been shielded from punishment'. Thus, the *Caucasian* concluded rhetorically, 'Are white men, because they are poor, slaves to abolition despotism?'[29] This critique of the 'war for abolition' seemed to suggest that any concern for African Americans was secondary and the focus of readership sympathy was to be on 'white slaves'.

A.M. Sullivan of the *Nation,* a more virulent nationalist than either Gray or Maguire, and editor of Ireland's first explicitly culturally nationalist newspaper, was strongly Confederate. Though initially opposed to the breaking up of 'that great Confederation, founded by the genius, the bravery, and the patriotism of Washington', Sullivan quickly attacked those who put all the blame for disunion at the feet of the South, because there was 'not a doubt that the South had been driven to its present stand and tempted to these extreme resolves by the policy and conduct of the North'. Indeed so deeply had the 'North violated its compacts and violated its obligations towards the Union' that it forced the South into a 'justified withdrawing from the Confederation'.[30] Sullivan thus accepted southern complaints over such perceived insults as northern opposition to the fugitive slave issue and the sympathy expressed to John Brown's failed attempt to raise a slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry, outlined in detail among southern secession declarations.[31]

Throughout the war, Sullivan applauded Confederate victories on the battle-field and Democrat victories on the homefront. He attacked what he called 'Federal atrocities' during the conflict and referred to the opposition Democrats as the 'Constitutional party'. He had nothing but scorn for abolitionists whom he compared to Jacobins who would introduce a 'Reign of Terror' in their pursuit of victory.[32] Sullivan accepted the rights of people to resort to violence for liberty in extreme cases, but he did not consider himself an extreme radical. The end did not justify the means. He ignored, though, the political reality of slavery, which until Lincoln made emancipation an explicit war aim in the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, continued to exist and provide significant support to the Confederate war effort.[33] Forced to respond to a proposal to end slavery in large

parts of the American South, Sullivan referred to the president's plan as 'sham negro abolition'. He explained more fully his position in an editorial 'On the Slavery Question' in November 1862. Like Maguire, he began by stating that as a Christian he considered slavery an 'evil' that would eventually have to end. But he qualified his remarks: 'on the slave question as it affects American policy, there are various opinions'. He broke these into three categories: the 'Puritan' abolitionists, who favoured immediate emancipation; the southern states who saw slavery as 'just and beneficial' and the 'constitutional view' of the Democratic party in the North, to which 'the majority of the Irish Americans belong' who find the end of slavery 'desirable' but not through 'unconstitutional' means. This latter group, Sullivan stated, believed 'the preservation of the Union is of more importance than the emancipation of the negroes'.[34] Sullivan saw himself as firmly in this camp, not yet overtly Confederate, though he was pretty close to that position. Either way, his stance meant the preservation of slavery.[35]

He justified the continuance of American slavery with the arguments pro-slaveryites used against the abolitionists. Among these were that abolitionists were prone to 'fictions or gross exaggerations' in their attacks on southern slavery. More emphatically, Sullivan wrote that 'the American slave system is a civiliser and a Christianiser, because it has taken the negroes out of utter savagery and heathenism in Africa, and brings them to the knowledge of civilization and the Gospel in America'. Whatever the violence inflicted by the odd American slaveowner on his slaves, 'their brethren in Africa are worse off, as there they are often killed by the hundred, and not only killed but eaten'.[36] This defence of slavery was a common one used to reply to abolitionist critics who claimed the mantle of philanthropy in their quest to end slavery. Here, Sullivan echoed the defence of slavery put forward by the extreme Irish nationalist, John Mitchel, who, in his critique of British laissez-faire capitalism, came to defend black slavery. The same 'civilising' arguments were also used to justify the expansion of the British Empire in the mid-nineteenth century.[37] Finally, Sullivan advanced further the old chestnut that the 'condition' of slaves was superior to that of many poor whites, especially in Europe. The only pro-slavery argument he balked at was that slavery had been ordained by God:

> we can easily believe that the worst features of the system are exaggerated by the writers of the abolitionist school; but we cannot assent to that view which would represent the Almighty as the patron of a system which makes man a chattel of his fellow man.

In practical terms, Sullivan's view was that slavery in the South was benign, certainly more so than the industrial system established by 'England' who, according to him, was amoral in the conflict having 'taken either side'.[38]

This position led to repeated calls from him for 'mediation' in the American conflict and observations that Union victories, such as Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863, were detrimental to the cause of 'peace'.[39] He became

particularly exasperated at Lincoln's evolving policies on slavery, which, he believed, would lead to 'a probable servile war'. This reality was likely because the '[Emancipation] Proclamation' would inspire its 'Abolitionist emissaries' to 'turn the heads of the negroes with emancipation notions', which would cause 'very sad scenes' such as 'insubordination on the plantation, riot, excesses of all sorts, plunder, and destruction of valuable property, and in many cases, complete ruin for years to come'. Sullivan wondered if the President and these abolitionists could control the 'negro frenzy' they had created.[40] There is irony here: Sullivan, who by the 1860s was a constitutional nationalist, had been a Young Irelander and a member of the Irish Confederation, which had supported armed insurrection in 1848, including the destruction of property and the killing of opponents in the cause of Irish nationalism. Though he had left behind his support of revolutionary violence, he never disavowed the right of the Irish people to assert themselves, with force if necessary, in their struggle for freedom. He did not extend the same right to African Americans.[41]

Even those few papers not afflicted with war fatigue and still rooting whole-heartedly for the Federal cause could not embrace fully the racial equality advocated by O'Connell. The *Galway American*, founded in that city by James Roche in 1861 specifically to propagate the Union cause (and a direct sea link between Galway and the United States) and one of the most consistent pro-Lincoln papers in Ireland, only embraced Emancipation as a war measure to bring down the 'Southern aristocrats' who had the support of the aristocratic class in Britain. As for the emancipated African Americans, Roche wrote,

> It is quite evident that the white population of the North will not allow the nigger population of the South to be thrust upon them as their equals. The present administration may emancipate them, but it cannot raise the African by any process of legislation to a level with the Caucasian race.

If they did, he continued, it would be 'folly … and lead to the annihilation of the black man'.[42]

P.J. Smyth of the *Dublin Irishman* emerges as the strongest supporter of the Emancipation policy in the nationalist Irish press at this time. A supporter of physical force nationalism, he had participated in the 1848 rebellion. Smyth initially had supported the Union cause in the Civil War because he believed that the seceded southern states had been lured to break up the United States by 'British intrigue, backed by British gold'.[43] It was the British promise of 'Free Trade' that had 'duped' the South into breaking away and founding the Confederacy. The prospect of conflict between Great Britain and the United States over the *Trent* affair in late 1861, when an American ship had stopped a Royal Mail ship on the high seas to seize Confederate agents, increased his support for the Union.[44] Additionally, his reading of conservative Irish unionists, such as those at the *Irish Times,* as hostile to Lincoln, cemented his support for the northern side. He criticised those Irish nationalists who

seemed to be siding with the South and called their actions as 'West-Britonism' and 'flunkeyism' of the worst kind. He reserved particular ire for Sullivan and the *Nation* from whom he had expected better. Smyth claimed that Sullivan and other nationalist 'degenerate journals', de-facto supported the Confederacy, were 'shameful' because they had 'back[ed] up England in her infamous conspiracy against the integrity of Ireland's best ally, the Great Republican Union of America'.[45] Federal Emancipation only increased his ardour for the northern side as he was in no doubt that the Confederate cause was linked inextricably to slavery whose aim was 'to erect on the ruins of the greatest republic in the world, a great slave empire'. Indeed, the whole 'object of secession was to build an empire whose corner-stone should be slavery'. Trying 'to discuss the American question', he continued, 'without referring to slavery is to enact the play Hamlet without the part of HAMLET'.[46]

Smyth, unlike his more experienced colleagues in the newspaper trade, the long-time publishers Maguire and Sullivan, clearly understood the roots of the conflict. Yet Smyth remained an exception. Where was this racism and denial of O'Connell, even among Irish nationalists sympathetic to the Union cause, coming from? Some of it was undoubtedly anti-abolitionist and not necessarily explicitly pro-slavery, as was the case in much of the contemporary Irish-American press.[47] Arguably it came from the Young Ireland tradition, which, from the early 1840s, had propagated a sense of Irishness rooted in racial difference. Its founder and ideological guide, Thomas Davis, a young Protestant from County Cork and a Trinity College graduate advocated this position. Though not necessarily obsessed with 'blood' definitions, especially since his own antecedents were from Britain, he still saw the Irish as a distinct 'race' with racial characteristics. He described, for example, the Irish as 'a military people strong, nimble and hardy, fond of adventure, irascible, brotherly and generous'.[48] Davis and his colleagues in Young Ireland would cast a long shadow over the popular interpretation of Irish nationalist history, reinforcing ideas of an essential Irishness for generations to come, including among those like Maguire who came from the O'Connellite tradition.[49] For mid-century Irish nationalists then, Young Ireland's prioritisation of the ancient Irish race's struggle against Britain superseded O'Connell's universalist concern for all in the oppressed human race.

As a result, the Irish could claim full membership of the larger 'white' race, both at home and abroad. The Young Irelander who most persistently defined, at home and abroad, a distinct Irish race as fully white was John Mitchel. Mitchel, a Derry Protestant and excellent propagandist, had converted to Davis's romantic nationalism while at Trinity College Dublin. He was among the first Young Irelanders to support the violent overthrow of British rule in Ireland, and had been sentenced to death, later commuted to transportation to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), for advocating revolution in the spring of 1848. He laid the blame for the Great Famine, still ravaging Ireland that year,

solely at the feet of the British government, seeing it as a deliberate attempt to exterminate the Irish. In 1853, he escaped Tasmania and arrived in the United States. By early 1854, he had emerged as a notorious supporter of slavery, by 1858 openly supporting calls in the United States to reopen the African slave trade through his Tennessee newspaper the *Southern Citizen.*

Many put this seemingly contradictory embrace of African slavery down to his hatred of British philanthropy, which extolled black freedom but allowed the 'extermination' of the Irish during the Famine. But there was more to Mitchel's support for slavery than hatred of British rule in Ireland and elsewhere: he was sure of the Irish as a superior race and far more so than Africans and those of African descent.[50] His influence was so strong with extreme nationalists that even those opposed to slavery and to the Confederacy came under his sway. Mitchel had been sprung from Tasmania by fellow Young Irelander, P.J. Smyth,[51] who used Mitchel as a foreign correspondent for the *Irishman* when Mitchel lived in Paris. He also published Mitchel's pro-slavery and pro-Confederate views on American matters and was never directly critical, even of views with which he did not agree.[52] For example, during the height of his outrage at fellow Irish nationalists' Confederate sympathies in early 1862, Smyth republished Mitchel's letters in the *Irishman* from an 1858 'Tour in the Cotton States', devoting up to two pages over five consecutive issues of his weekly paper to his friend's views on the South and its slavery system. Smyth introduced these pieces as correspondence 'descriptive of a region now peculiarly interesting'. They were originally published in Mitchel's *Southern Citizen* in Knoxville, Tennessee, to promote the legal reopening of the transatlantic slave trade, banned since 1808, and they provide important insight into Mitchel's racialist thought. Africans, he wrote, were 'barbarous' and slavery would thus be good for them: 'negro slaves are in a greatly better and higher position upon [the] plantation than any African negro in Africa'. Africans, he continued, were 'crying aloud' to be brought to the South as chattel and rescued 'from a too probable death to ornament a mat palace with their skulls, to propitiate a divine monkey, or merely to furnish forth as a solemn feast with their brains'. Ultimately, in light of this scenario, Mitchel wrote 'the cause of negro slavery is the cause of true philanthropy, so far as that race is concerned'. Slavery, Mitchel believed, was more philanthropic than emancipation.[53]

Smyth had perhaps seen fit to reprint the most rabid pieces of pro-slavery propaganda from the 1850s in order, as he concluded in his introduction to Mitchel's series, to 'throw some light on the causes of which have led to the rupture of the Union'.[54] But if his intent was to attract more support for the Union cause and Emancipation, he was to be disappointed. His opponents on American matters, including A.M. Sullivan, loved to highlight the inconsistencies of Smyth's newspaper in relation to the Civil War. In response to Smyth's criticism of Sullivan's pro-Confederate position, the latter republished a number of pieces under an article entitled 'The Wonderful Performances of "Jump Jim Crow"' using a description of the blackface minstrel character

popular on American stages, someone 'whose circumvolutions were very rapid and very grotesque', to imply that Smyth's U-turns back and forth on the Civil War left him, unlike the *Nation,* 'unsteady', confused in his views, and equally comically grotesque.[55]

To be fair to Smyth, his personal position against slavery was often strong but his connection to Mitchel and to Mitchel's pro-Confederate brother-in-law, John Martin, made his overall editorial position more ambiguous. As Garrison had noted, the Irish cause trumped all others. As the war continued into 1864, it seemed that the Irish nationalist readership was more on the side of Sullivan than Smyth when it came to the fight against slavery. Papers like the *Nation,* the *Cork Examiner* and the *Freeman's Journal* had circulations running into the tens of thousands, and a broader audience of rural and urban Irish nationalists than the *Irishman,* which appealed to the more extreme nationalists, the Fenians, with Ann Andrews positioning the *Nation* as 'the most influential newspaper of the mid-nineteenth century for the development of Irish nationalism'.[56]

Thus, though there was an early sympathy for the United States at the beginning of the conflict, once the war dragged on and became more about slavery than the preservation of the Union, general Irish support declined. Observers like Gray and Maguire saw the shift in war aims as intensifying and prolonging the conflict. Unlike in Britain, for example, where Union support was revitalised by Emancipation through groups such as the Union and Emancipation Society (UES), founded in Manchester in 1863, Ireland became more pro-Confederate. It had no branch of the UES. Indeed the only substantial anti-slavery meetings in the country took place in Belfast and even these did not receive huge support.[57] Far more significant was the success that Confederate agents found for their cause in Ireland in late 1863 and early 1864. Father John Bannon, for example, sent by the Confederate State Department to try and stop Irish emigration to the United States, wrote repeatedly of the welcome he received from fellow clergy in Ireland. He targeted the *Freeman's Journal* in particular because of its high readership among Catholic priests. A later arrival, Irish-born Confederate officer James F. Lalor, opened, as he put it, 'a Confederate salon' off Baggot Street in Dublin in early 1864. He found himself welcome among the great and good in the city. Again, he played up the independence angle denying, for example, charges that had appeared regarding the massacre of black troops at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in April of that year.[58]

All this effort culminated in numerous petitions being sent from Ireland to Parliament asking for intervention from Her Majesty's government to mediate and force an end to the conflict.[59] These individual efforts led to the great 'Peace Address' of September 1864 where over 300,000 signed a petition organised by a Confederate sympathiser in Manchester to be presented to the U.S. government calling for a ceasefire and negotiations to the end the war, giving de facto recognition to the Confederacy rather than to the Federal policy of emancipation. U.S. consuls in Ireland acknowledged that priests throughout the country were encouraging their parishioners to sign it and the London *Times* estimated that about 130,000 of the signatures

were from Ireland.[60] Local petitions to Parliament regarding the 'American war' also increased massively in 1864, calling for a 'termination' of the conflict, with several more explicit in advocating termination 'on the basis of Southern Independence'. Of the 78 petitions of this nature, almost 30 per cent came from Ireland, from Cork to Belfast and Leitrim to Waterford. Their presenters in Parliament ranged across the political spectrum from the Conservative representatives for Dublin University and Belfast to nationalists for Cork and Clare.[61]

Undoubtedly, the nationalist press, which had grown dramatically in popularity from the 1850s when the British government had abolished various taxes on newspapers, played a major role in drumming up support for the Confederacy in its final attempts to survive with slavery intact.[62] The plight of the enslaved, once so eloquently extolled by O'Connell, was to be ignored. Men like Smyth, Maguire, Gray and Roche, representing various shades of Irish nationalist opinion, saw themselves as friends of liberty. They were, however, mainly friends of 'white liberty', thus shattering O'Connell's anti-slavery legacy and indicating a strong sense of their identity as an 'Irish race', similar to or better than other European races. Unintentionally, perhaps, O'Connell's rhetoric on the Irish and their superiority to the 'Anglo-Saxon race' in his campaign for some form of Irish independence had played a role in this creation of a racial Irish identity. It was ironically O'Connell – universalist, enlightened man that he was – who had sowed the initial seeds in this growing sense of an exclusive and nationalist Irishness.[63] Bruce Nelson acknowledges that O'Connell was 'a racial essentialist' recognising the inherent nature of Irishness in the Irish people. O'Connell's choice of location for his famous mass 'Monster Meetings' such as Tara (the ancient seat of the High Kings of Ireland) and Clontarf (where Brian Ború had struck a blow for the 'Irish' against the 'foreign invader Vikings') was telling.[64] Whatever O'Connell's culpability, however, some of his former colleagues and acolytes went a lot further and used their sense of a racial Irishness as an excuse to ignore his clarion cry and not 'unite with the abolitionists'.

Notes

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Books, 2003), 168–9.
2. Christine Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-slavery Movement* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011); Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 57–85.
3. *Boston Liberator*, March 25, 1842; Nelson, *Irish Nationalists*, 65–6. For the roots of O'Connell's abolitionism, see also Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Liberator: The Life and Death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2010), 197–205.
4. Angela F. Murphy, *American Slavery, Irish Freedom: Abolition, Immigrant Citizenship and the Movement for Irish Repeal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

5. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8–39. See also David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 1991), 133–65.

6. Nelson, *Irish Nationalists*, 67.

7. Douglass moved in very rarefied circles in Ireland meeting mostly with those sympathetic to his cause, middle-class Quakers, abolitionists, etc., thus his feel for Irish public opinion was limited. He did, however, have some contact with a more diverse range of Irish people in his travels and he welcomed the lack of racial prejudice in the country. See, for example, Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), 371. See also Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 34–5. For the Catholic Church's tacit support for slavery, see Joseph T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 43–67. For the Democratic party as the party of white supremacy, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Has Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4, 365–7, 386, 413.

8. Quoted in Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: 1983; repr., New York: Penguin Putnam, 1994), 740. See also Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World.*

9. *Boston Liberator*, Nov. 24, 1843.

10. *Cork Examiner*, Jan. 2, 1861.

11. Ibid. See also, for example, *Cork Examiner*, Jan. 7, Feb. 4, 1862; Joseph M. Hernon, Jr., *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads: Ireland Views the American Civil War* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 17–19.

12. See William E. Gienapp, 'Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North Before the Civil War', *Journal of American History* 72 (1985): 529–59; Jason H. Silverman, *Lincoln and the Immigrant* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), 71–81.

13. *Cork Examiner*, June 10, 1861.

14. James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 224–317.

15. *Cork Examiner*, Sept. 19, 1861.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 156–9.

18. John Francis Maguire, *Father Mathew, a Biography* (New York: D.J. Sadlier, 1864).

19. John Quinn, 'Father Mathew's American Tour', *Éire-Ireland* 30 (1995): 91–104. For more on Father Mathew's international significance, see Paul A. Townend, 'Mathewite Temperance in Atlantic Perspective', in *The Irish in the Atlantic World*, ed. David T. Gleeson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 20–37.

20. Maguire, *Father Mathew*, 469, 472.

21. See, for example, *Cork Examiner*, Oct. 29, 1862, May 21, 1863, Aug. 30, 1864, March 8, 1865.

22. Felix M. Larkin, 'The Dog in the Night-Time: The *Freeman's Journal*, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Empire, 1875-1919', in *Newspapers and Empire in Britain and Ireland: Reporting the British Empire, 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 110–11.

23. *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, Jan. 2, 1861.

24. Ibid., March 7, 1861.

25. Quoted in Geoghegan, *Liberator*, 206; *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, Sept. 25, 1861.

26. *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, Jan. 2, 1861.

27. *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, Aug. 11, Sept. 9, 17, Nov. 9, 1863.
28. William Wilde, quoted in Hernon, Jr., *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 33.
29. *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, Sept. 10, 1863.
30. *Dublin Nation*, Dec. 1, 1860, Jan. 5, 1861.
31. For perception among southerners of northern 'insults' around slavery, see, for example, 'A Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and the Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union', Jan. 9, 1861, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_missec.asp.
32. *Dublin Nation*, 20 Sept., 15, 22 Nov. 1862.
33. For the importance of slaves to the Confederate war effort, see Jaime Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
34. *Dublin Nation*, Nov. 8, 1862, 17 Jan. 1863.
35. George McClellan, for example, who became the Democratic nominee opposed to Lincoln in the 1864 election, was 'strongly committed to separating the war for the Union from a war against slavery'. Oakes, *Freedom National*, 211.
36. *Dublin Nation*, Nov. 8, 1862.
37. Niamh Lynch, 'Defining Irish Nationalist Anti-imperialism: Thomas Davis and John Mitchel', *Éire-Ireland* 42 (Spring/Summer 2007): 94–101; David T. Gleeson, 'Securing the "Interests" of the South: John Mitchel, A. G. Magrath and the Reopening of the Transatlantic Slave Trade', *American Nineteenth Century History* 11 (2010): 282–6; Andrew Porter, *Religion vs. Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 136–62.
38. *Dublin Nation*, Nov. 8, 1862.
39. Ibid., Nov. 15, 1862; Jan. 10, July 25, 1863.
40. Ibid., Jan. 10, 17, 1863.
41. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 55: 167–8. For Sullivan's defence of 1848, see Alexander M. Sullivan, *The Story of Ireland: A Narrative of Irish History* (repr., Providence, RI: Henry McIlroy, 1883), 554–9.
42. *Galway American*, Aug. 1, 12, 1863.
43. *Dublin Irishman*, May 16, 1861.
44. D.J. O'Donoghue and Brigitte Anton, 'Smyth, Patrick James', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com; *Dublin Irishman*, Nov. 30, 1861.
45. Ibid., Jan. 11, Feb. 15., Oct. 25, 1862.
46. Ibid., June 27, Nov. 28, 1863.
47. See, for example, *New York Weekly Irish American*, Oct. 28, 1849.
48. Quoted in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery, 'An Irish Military Tradition?', in *A Military History of Ireland*, ed. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13; Helen F. Mulvey, *Thomas Davis and Ireland: A Biographical Study* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2003), 21–3, 220.
49. James Quinn, *Young Ireland and the Writing of Irish History* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015).
50. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, 19–21. The best biography of Mitchel is Bryan P. McGovern, *John Mitchel, Irish Nationalist and Southern Secessionist* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009).
51. O'Donoghue and Anton, 'Smyth, Patrick James', Thomas Keneally, *The Great Shame: A Story of the Irish in Old World and New* (New York: Random House, 1998), 80, 260–7; *Dublin Irishman*, Nov. 30, 1860; John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland*

(Perhaps) (repr. Glasgow: R and T Buchanan, 1882); *Jail Journal: Or Five Years in British Prisons* (New York: *The Citizen*, 1854).

52. *Dublin Irishman,* Dec. 1, 29, 1860, Jan. 5, Feb. 9, May 20, 1861.
53. Ibid., Jan. 11, 18, 25, Feb. 1, 8, 1862; see also *Knoxville (TN) Southern Citizen*, March 11, 1858.
54. *Dublin Irishman*, Jan. 11, 1862.
55. *Dublin Nation*, Nov. 22, 1862. Irish Americans may have used black-face minstrelsy to propagate the significance of their own 'race' over that of African Americans, see Robert Nowatski, 'Paddy Jumps Jim Crow: Irish Americans and Blackface Minstrelsy', *Éire-Ireland* 41 (2006): 162–84.
56. Ann Andrews, *Newspapers and Newsmakers: The Dublin Nationalist Press in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 11. Accurate circulation figures are hard to come by, but there is no doubt that the *Nation,* the *Cork Examiner* and the *Freeman's Journal* were more popular than the *Irishman*. Andrews, *Newspapers and Newsmakers,* 170, 179, 181; Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism: The Irish Provincial Press, 1850-1892* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 138, 190; Larkin, 'The Dog in the Night-Time', 110–1.
57. R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 80–8, 98–120; Hernon, *Celts, Catholics, and Copperheads*, 78.
58. John Bannon to [Judah P.] Benjamin, Nov. 17, 22, Dec. 15, 1863, Jan. 19, Feb. 17, March 9, April 9, 1864; James Fintan Lalor to J.P. Benjamin [May 1864], Pickett Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. For more on Fort Pillow, see Brian Steel Wills, *The River Was Dyed with Blood: Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Fort Pillow Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).
59. *Report of the Committee on Public Petitions, 1864*, Parliamentary Archives, Palace of Westminster, London.
60. *Times*, Oct. 12, 1864; Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), 679–80; Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 103–4.
61. *Report of the Committee on Public Petitions, 1864*, 630, 679, 729, 750, 759, 778, 806, 837, 847, Parliamentary Archives, Palace of Westminster, London.
62. Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 30–2; Andrews, *Newspapers and Newsmakers*, 139, 184–5.
63. Sean McGraw and Kevin Whelan, 'Daniel O'Connell in Comparative Perspective, 1800-50', *Éire-Ireland* 40 (2005): 60–89.
64. Nelson, *Irish Nationalists*, 59; Murphy, *American Slavery*, 129–32, 197–8, 201–13. See also Gilbert Osofsky, 'Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Limits of Romantic Nationalism', *American Historical Review* 80 (1975): 889–912 and Douglas C. Riach, 'Daniel O'Connell and American Anti-Slavery', *Irish Historical Studies* 20 (1976): 3–25.

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