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Published as: 'To live and let die [for] Dixie': Irish Civilians and the Confederate States of America

“Irish Civilians and the Confederate States of America”

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In July of 1861, the students and faculty of St. Vincent’s Academy in Savannah, Georgia, changed their graduation festivities. That year, the graduates from the city’s Catholic secondary school for girls, operated by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, enacted a “Secession Conference” pageant as part of their commencement ceremony. The pageant began with the local Catholic pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah O’Neill, crowning a girl who represented South Carolina with a garland of flowers. She then in turn crowned Mississippi, and so on and so forth, until every state in the Confederacy had been recognized. In 1862, they repeated the exercise and sang the pro-Confederate anthem, “Maryland, My Maryland” (and in Catholic wishful thinking, crowned Maryland as well). They also included speeches on “Southern Patriotism” and “Sewing for the soldiers.” Just as the graduates were facing the world for the first time, so, too, was the new Confederate States of America. These exercises thus had a deeper meaning beyond regular patriotic display. St. Vincent’s had been founded in 1845 by the predominantly Irish Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy who had sent nuns from their mother house in Charleston, South Carolina, to establish a school for Catholic girls. The Sisters had been founded by Reverend O’Neill’s clerical mentor, the County Cork born-and-raised Bishop John England of Charleston, as part of the public face of the Catholic Church in South Carolina and Georgia. The sisters educated and

ministered to the poor; they made a fine reputation for themselves during yellow fever epidemics, taking care of the sick when many natives fled cities affected by the deadly disease. The sisters were therefore well respected in the larger community.

Father Jeremiah O'Neill was too. A native of County Kerry and friend of the great "Liberator" Daniel O'Connell, he had pastored the Catholic community since the late 1830s. Native Savannah residents, looking upon him as the leader of the city's Catholics, called on him to speak at a public meeting after Abraham Lincoln's election in late 1860. From the platform in Johnson Square in the heart of the city, he stated, on behalf of the Irish and larger Catholic community in Savannah, that they would support any move toward secession. Eight months later, he was collecting money at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist for the Confederacy and earning the praise of the Confederate secretary of the treasury.¹ Here was the leader and public face of the Irish community in Savannah openly endorsing the Confederate cause to his predominantly Irish flock.

Ultimately, some 20,000 Irish, including hundreds from Savannah, served in the Confederate army. This number was a sizeable recruitment, considering that only about 85,000 Irish immigrants lived in the eleven states that became the Confederacy. It was, however, a much smaller total than the more than 150,000 Irish who served in the Union Army. Although often performing well in battle, Irish soldiers and commanders did not command enough of a presence to affect the outcome of the War.² Nonetheless, the story of the Irish in the Confederacy is an important one. In particular, examining the role of civilians in the conflict highlights how Irish people integrated [see Joyce's paper, this issue]. It has been alleged that wars have long provided immigrants chances to "prove" their loyalty to their new home.

Similarly, wars are thought to highlight what host countries think of their immigrants, particularly those on the homefront.³ Thus, Irish civilians and their lives in the Confederacy have an importance beyond their own story; they tell us about Irish life in America in the mid-nineteenth century, their host society, and, in this case, the ever growing sectional southern states.

By 1860—the highpoint of Irish presence in the antebellum United States—the tension between “the North” and “the South” had reached chronic proportions. The aforementioned election of Lincoln was the catalyst for seven southern states to move toward secession between December and February 1861. Almost immediately, these seven, all in the Deep South, began to form a nation by writing a constitution, electing an executive branch, and forming an army for the “Confederate States of America.” By his inauguration in March, Lincoln faced a fully-fledged new government in the South. After the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, in April by Confederate forces and the resulting outbreak of the Civil War, four more southern states joined the Confederacy. The now expanded Confederacy faced not only consolidating its political structures but also constructing an ideology for it. To win the war, it was vital to have as much of the southern white population as possible behind their new nation.⁴

Confederate leaders and authorities thus took the new national project seriously. They quickly sought to build nationalism around their new nation.⁵ Early Irish endorsement of the Confederacy, such as that displayed by the Sisters of Mercy and their students in Savannah, was exactly what the new southern government wanted. Ultimately, however, despite strong efforts, many scholars believe the Confederate government failed to create the sense of national identity they sought, a fact that “made the Confederacy more vulnerable to the demoralizing effect of

heavy casualties and hardships.” Soldiers at the front, and civilians, especially women on the homefront, faced these “demoralizing effects.” This lack of morale caused a “crisis” of confidence at home; in fact, the Confederates’ “lack of will constituted the decisive deficiency in the Confederates arsenal,” a key factor that led to its defeat. ⁶

Not everyone agrees with this thesis. Historians such as Gary Gallagher point out that the Confederate army continued to fight well, and it was the battlefield and not the homefront that really mattered. Morale at home was dependent on military performance and not the other way around. Recently, historians have emerged who agree somewhat with Gallagher but return focus to the homefront. They believe that the traditional debate has focused too much on the politicians and the generals and not enough on the regular Confederates. As one puts it: “Confederates sustained their nationalism in the face of challenges not through a centralized propaganda apparatus, but through countless personal exchanges.” The remarkable Confederate war effort could not have lasted without a strong “common vocabulary” based on “nationalist and patriotic rhetoric.”⁷

Well, the Irish were “regular folk” in the Old South. Although not large in number, they concentrated in southern towns and were very visible minorities there. The roughly 85,000 who lived in the eleven states that joined the Confederacy were mostly immigrants who had grown up in an era of increasing Irish ethnic awareness. Most had come during and immediately after the Great Famine, which meant they had gone through the massive political organization of the Daniel O’Connell era. They had witnessed the collection of the Catholic and Repeal rent by priests in their churches. A “devotional revolution” made priests leaders of their communities. Along with this Catholic revanchism, Irish immigrants were aware of the Young Ireland

movement, which was the first to describe the “Irish nation” in cultural terms. They had heard of the Young Ireland rebellion and the trials of its leaders, particularly those of John Mitchel, Thomas Francis Meagher, and William Smith O’Brien. Of course, the Famine itself also created a strong sense of national identity; it was fostered by men like Mitchel, who declared the famine a British attempt at genocide.⁸ Thus, arriving as immigrants in America with a much stronger sense of Irishness, as opposed to a regional or county identity, they faced an America trying to create its own national identity. The Irish thus had to negotiate their identity with a developing American one.⁹

Having gone through the process of fitting into America, those Irish who lived in the South also faced the reality of becoming Confederate in 1861. As had Reverend Jeremiah O’Neill in Savannah, Irish community leaders throughout the South showed the way to becoming good Confederates. Many in other parts of the South quickly endorsed a southern and Confederate identity. In Charleston, South Carolina, one week after the state’s secession, Irish-born Bishop Patrick Lynch changed the title of his diocesan paper from the *United States Catholic Miscellany* to the *Charleston Catholic Miscellany*; later, he and fellow-born Ulsterman Catholic Archbishop John Hughes of New York disputed politically the legitimacy of secession and the Confederacy (see Mary C. Kelly’s paper, this issue). Lynch’s predecessor, Bishop John England, to highlight his and his mostly Irish congregants’ integration into the United States, had deliberately chosen to add “United States” to the title when he founded the paper in 1826. Lynch was stating that same compatibility with South Carolina and the Confederate States. He went beyond the symbolic by encouraging his flock to enlist in the Confederate Army. To encourage recruitment, he organized an elaborate ceremony to bless and present a company flag, made by

the students of the local Catholic girls' school, to an Irish unit about to muster into Confederate service. At the ceremony in his Cathedral of St. Finbar and St. John the Baptist, he told the soldiers: "The banner I present today is the work of fair hands of innocence. It gives to the breeze and the light of the sun the emblems of Erin—the Shamrock and the Harp—with the Palmetto of Carolina and Stars of our Southern Confederacy. You will recollect all those lessons of religion and innocence that have been taught you." He concluded:

Receive it then [the flag]—rally around it. Let it teach you of God—of Erin—of Carolina.

Let it teach you your duty in this life as soldiers and as Christians, so that fighting the good fight of Christians you may receive the reward of eternal victory from the King of Kings.¹⁰

Lynch offered *Te Deums* (special Catholic Masses of praise to God) whenever Confederates won major military victories; he later became the Confederate ambassador to the Vatican and sought recognition for the Confederate States. While in Rome, he wrote a defense of slavery to ease European qualms about the institution. Viewing himself as an amateur scientist, he refused to defend the institution on Biblical or theological grounds. Instead, he made a cultural and explicitly racial defense. There was perhaps no more ardent or important Confederate Irish cleric in the South.¹¹

While not as influential, other bishops agreed with Lynch, and removed any obstacles that might halt Irish support for the Confederate cause. John Quinlan, the County-Cork born bishop of Mobile, Alabama, blessed the company flag of the local Emerald Guards in a ceremony very similar to the one in Charleston. Quinlan later served as "banker" to Irish substitutes who received money for serving in other men's places. In fact, without his holding of

the money, many of the transactions would not have taken place. In Savannah, bishop Augustin Verot's pro-Confederate stance earned him the title "Rebel Bishop." After Georgia's secession, he took it upon himself to "[prove] the legitimacy of slavery." This French bishop wrote a catechism "for the use of Catholics in the Confederate States of America." In the section on the fourth commandment ("Honor thy father and mother") he added:

Q. Is it forbidden to hold slaves?

A. No, both the Old and New Testaments bear witness to the lawfulness of that institution. Gen. XVI, 9; 1 Tim VI, 1, 2, 8.¹²

Thus, the local Irish Confederates could have no doubt as to legitimacy of their fight for the Confederacy.

Bishops throughout the South also appointed chaplains to remind Irish and other Catholic soldiers of their duty to God and the Confederacy. Irish chaplains like Fathers James Sheeran, James McNeilly, Abram Ryan, and John Bannon were ardent Confederates and religious mentors to Irish soldiers.¹³ Bannon was the most well-recognized of the Irish chaplains. His renown as a Confederate and as the "Fighting Chaplain" of the "exiled" Missouri Brigade made him famous throughout the South. Captured after the fall of Vicksburg, he received a pardon from the Union forces and went to Richmond for new duty at the behest of President Davis. With governmental support, he traveled to Europe to attempt to prevent Irish immigrants from signing on with the Union Army.¹⁴ Through a vigorous newspaper, poster, and speaking campaign, he achieved some success. Although he failed to stop Irish immigration to the northern states [see Harris's and Sommers-Smith's paper, this issue], he did change many Irish residents' opinions of the justice of the Confederate cause, and, according to his Confederate

superior in London, may have cut the annual Union recruitment in Ireland by two-thirds, thereby keeping thousands of Irish men out of the Union army. In absentia, the Confederate Congress rewarded his efforts with a vote of thanks and a \$3,000 bonus.¹⁵

Irish religious women were also important to the Confederate cause and the Irish image in the Confederacy (see Giemza's and Quinn's papers, this issue). For example, the mostly Irish order of the Sisters of Charity left Natchez to operate a military hospital in Monroe, Louisiana, while the altruistic actions of the Irish Ursulines in Columbia, South Carolina, made them "the mainstay and the comfort of the afflicted people" and the "Church at last popular." In Savannah, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy left their school and established field hospitals in Dalton, Atlanta, and Augusta; their efforts impressed native-born doctors, nurses, and soldiers. One Bill Fletcher from Texas noted that he lost his anti-Catholic prejudice when these Sisters saved his foot from amputation after the Battle of Chickamauga in September, 1863. After the war, when he had made a lot of money in the lumber business, in gratitude to the sisters he opened a Catholic hospital in Beaumont, Texas.¹⁶

Secular Irish leaders also showed their support for the cause. In 1861, the elite civilian leaders of the Savannah Hibernian Society celebrated St. Patrick's Day with toasts to Jefferson Davis, to the Confederate Constitution, and to Irish patriot and Confederate sympathizer, John Mitchel. They also, however, toasted their fellow countrymen, many of whom were at the celebration and preparing to fight for the cause. President D. A. O'Byrne, whose father was from County Mayo, toasted "Irishmen—Ever ready to meet a foreign foe."¹⁷ The Charleston, South Carolina, Hibernians unanimously withdrew the honorary membership it had given to Thomas Francis Meagher when he came out for the Union and started to organize an Irish

Brigade. One T. W. MacMahon of Richmond wrote a scathing attack on Meagher and other Irish supporters of the northern cause, pointing out what he saw as the glaring contradiction between advocating the repeal of the Union between Ireland and Great Britain and opposing Confederate repeal of the American union by violent means. John McFarland, a cotton manufacturer [CHECK] from New Orleans and Yazoo City, who had arrived in the South, as, in his words, “a penniless youth”, gave money to a local volunteer company that changed its name to the McFarland Rifles in his honor. An anonymous “Irish druggist” offered \$500 at a public meeting to build an ironclad vessel, raising the award to \$1,000 if it could be built in one month.¹⁸

Two men in particular took it further. In 1862, the aforementioned T. W. MacMahon published a dense and elaborate defense of both Confederacy and slavery, one that garnered acclaim throughout the South. More prominent, however, was the aforementioned John Mitchel. He was a hero to many Irish immigrants for his outspoken criticism of British rule in Ireland, his spectacular call for rebellion in 1848, and his escape from a commuted death sentence to life as a convict in Tasmania. Although his words were more effective than his actions, he used the same invective style he had used against the British government in favor of the Confederate cause. The two issues were linked in his mind because the British “form of civilization,” industrialization and laissez-faire capitalism, which represented, as Mitchel liked to call it, “the spirit of the age,” would lead “to ruin,” just as it had ruined the peasantry of Ireland during the Famine. He saw in the South hope of an alternative, more “civilized” system. Thus, his aim was “to promote the success of [this] one and the ruin of the other.” Once he had endorsed what

historian Eugene Genovese has described as the South's "alternative World view," [CHECK ON CAPITAL "W" IN "WORLD"] he embraced it wholeheartedly.¹⁹

In France when the Civil War broke out in 1861, Mitchel ran the blockade in early 1862, traveling straight to Richmond. He served in the ambulance corps during the various sieges of the city through the War, but made a name for himself as a journalist, first for the pro-Jefferson Davis *Richmond Enquirer*, and later for the anti-Davis *Richmond Examiner*. Although Mitchel never signed his articles, often one can see his themes coming through, particularly in writings comparing the South to Ireland. For example, he tried to keep up Confederate spirits in 1863, after the disasters at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, by highlighting how occupied peoples like the Irish only grew more nationalist in defeat. He constantly criticized British policies, accusing them of de facto support for the North by not recognizing the Confederacy or halting Union recruitment in Ireland. To counter the often anti-immigrant feeling of his editor, he also wrote about the heroism of Irish soldiers, linking it to historical fights against the British. Mitchel's three sons served in the Confederate army; two, including his eldest and namesake, died in combat. His wife endured the hardships of wartime Richmond when she, like her husband, ran the blockade with their younger children. Having gone to New York to take another journalist position at war's end, Mitchel remained such an unreconstructed rebel that President Andrew Johnson had him arrested and thrown into prison with Jefferson Davis (though not in the same cell). Released on condition of leaving the United States, he moved to France and then back to Ireland, where he was elected MP for County Tipperary in 1875. He remained an inspiration to the southern Irish, and even to other Irish Americans who forgave his pro-Confederate activities.

In the South, for example, he had Fenian circles and a prominent militia unit in New Orleans named in his honor in 1866.²⁰

Yet what of the majority of the Irish in the South, the poorer folk? Did they listen to their community leaders? Many did. Irish units sprang up all over the Confederacy, and their family members at home often supported them. Irish civilians packed the various churches and lined the streets to see their boys off. They sewed flags for them and occasionally followed them to camp. One Catherine Culhane, for example, an Irish tavern keeper from Natchez, Mississippi, went to visit her surviving son (two others having died in service), in Virginia in June 1863, just before he, too, was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg.²¹

Irish civilians showed their support in less direct ways. To return to St. Vincent's Academy in Savannah, it is worth noting that the secession conference was not just a display of Irish Confederate patriotism for the local native-born population; it was also a message of kinship for relatives at the front. A number of students and nuns had brothers in the Confederate army. A young Ellen McGowan had one brother in the Irish Jasper Greens, and another in a different unit serving in the army. Her participation in the secession pageant marked her graduation, her Confederate patriotism, and her support for her brother.

Loyalty to the local Irish boys led some Irish civilians to dislike the northern Irish. In Charleston, South Carolina, for example, a crowd of local Irish turned on a bunch of Irish union prisoners in 1861, showering them with rocks and other missiles. The recorder of the event, a native Confederate guarding the prisoners, was forced to fix his bayonet upon the Charlestonians in order to keep them from inflicting even more violence on their northern compatriots.²²

Economic realities, however, soon cooled Confederate ardor. As early as 1861, observers noted that the wives of laborers and their children faced “destitution” when their major bread-winners were gone. There was some sympathy at first, as witnessed by the establishment of “free markets” around the South. Those set up in New Orleans, Mobile, and Richmond had the greatest impact on the Irish. Initially, these efforts may have eased class and ethnic tensions. Historian Emory Thomas acknowledges that, although these free markets were an added burden to city authorities in the South, and although they achieved partial success, they were still “indications of heightened social and economic conscience.” Indeed, being poor and desperate may have been a sign of Confederate patriotism compared to those who hoarded and exploited through the black market.²³

From 1862 onwards, the blockade bit harder, and direct military threat from Union armies increased. It was then that many Irish sought just to survive; it was then, too, that native attitudes hardened toward foreigners. The first issue arose with the foreign exemption clause of the Confederate conscription act. This legislation, which established a draft, also provided exemptions for those who had never been naturalized or who had never expressed a desire to do so. Most Irish soldiers, having signed up “for the War” in 1861, did not take advantage of this clause, but one very prominent unit nearly disintegrated because of it. The Montgomery Guards of Richmond were *the* elite pre-war Irish militia in the city. They had mustered in to the First Virginia Regiment and served with distinction at the Battle of First Manassas. In March and April of 1862, however, dozens sought to leave the service, using civilian friends on the homefront to help them. Those seeking foreign exemption needed a witness to support their case. For example, County Limerick native Private William Buckley got one Patrick Moroney of

Richmond to swear that he had heard Buckley state that he had only come to America for work and had always intended to return to Ireland. He never, according to Moroney, showed any inclination toward becoming a Virginian or an American. Private Matthew Bresnahan of County Kerry was fortunate enough to get the British Consul in Richmond to support his plea that he had only come “on a visit,” one that had, however, lasted three and a half years! Despite the disingenuousness of these cases—the Irish were the least likely of any nineteenth-century immigrant group to return to the homeland—both men were discharged.²⁴ This was the kind of ultimate disloyalty that called into question Irish support for the Confederacy.

Many in Richmond resented the unwillingness of the Irish to serve, a resentment that increased when many of the Irish (and other workers) refused to join militias when the city came under attack in the summers of 1862 and 1864. Irish men often labored in the various arsenals and foundries throughout the city. Foreign workers at the Tredegar Iron works, for example, among whom were numbers of Irish, left the foundry as early as 1862 to avoid military duty and low wages. They even refused to join the Tredegar Battalion, which was only used in extreme emergencies and usually just served in the trenches around Richmond. Native white southerners made up the bulk of this battalion.²⁵ In Charleston, many Irish civilians also refused to serve, even when the city faced attack. In 1863 and 1864, numbers of Irishmen were thrown into the city jail, then within range of Union guns besieging the city. One James Gorman, a laborer, complained that he was locked up for not serving, even though he was a British subject and had never been naturalized. When the British Consul got him released and he returned to his place of work, his employers refused to reinstate him in his old position or give him back pay worth almost \$150.²⁶

Gorman's story is insightful, for it demonstrates that, unless one was vital to the military effort by working in munitions, mining, etc., refusing to serve exacerbated one's economic situation. In 1863, Virginia passed a law that denied any and all business licenses to foreigners not enlisted in the militia. However, those who wanted to leave faced the obstacle of getting passes to cross to Union lines. The Confederate government recommended that they could only go to "neutral" ports, something impossible to do with the Union blockade. The British Consul in Richmond, one George Moore, felt so exasperated by the situation that he asked the Foreign Office "to have steamers sent to City Point on the James River [near Richmond] for their [the British subjects'] conveyance to Baltimore or New York." In 1864, the Confederate state of Georgia told all foreigners claiming military exemption to leave the state within ten days, a virtual impossibility without a pass to the Union lines.

Even those who had been sympathetic to the plight of the Irish in the South turned against those who had not yet enlisted. Confederate judge Andrew Gordon (A. G.) Magrath abolished all foreign exemptions in South Carolina. A Charlestonian, Magrath's father had been a refugee from the United Irish rebellion in Ireland. Magrath himself was a member of the Hibernian Society and the St. Patrick Benevolent Society; he had led the local Irish militia in the 1830s. In the 1850s, he had campaigned actively against the nativist Know-Nothings by pointing out the military service of foreigners. However, in 1863, he turned on the very foreigners he had once defended, seeing them as disloyal residents of the Confederacy.²⁷

The actions of Irish women also annoyed native Confederates. The *Daily Richmond Examiner*, for example, virtually offered daily coverage of the antics of Irish women in the city. They were always, it seems, drunk, fighting, or thieving. Many seemed to run illegal grog shops

and a few “houses of ill-fame.” Being too poor, the one charge the Irish usually avoided was that of speculating (a charge generally reserved for the “Dutch” i.e. Germans, and often “Jews”). The Richmond “Bread Riot” of April 1863, however, brought Irish women’s disloyalty into sharper focus. Another Richmond paper referred to the riot as the work of “prostitutes, professional thieves, [and] Irish and Yankee hags, gallows birds from all lands but our own.” Although one police officer did observe a “chuckle headed Irish woman assail a store door with an axe,” most of the rioters, with names like Bell, Hampton, Johnson, Pomfrey, Radford, Smith, and Taliaferro, were *not* foreigners. However, the stigma still attached. In June, 1864, the *Examiner* railed against the city for supporting the [CHECK: WHERE DOES THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION END?] “families (Yankee, English, Irish, Scotch, Dutch) whose heads never felt the misfortune of war, but who only enriched themselves by speculation and extortion, and betook themselves to the enemy on the very first sight of danger. “First,” the paper continued, “give to the deserving poor,” i.e. soldiers’ wives and widows. The irony, of course, was that there were numbers of Irish soldiers’ wives and widows in the city. No matter; when word reached the *Examiner* that a number of Irish and German women had sought to go North as the Union forces under the new and aggressive General U. S. Grant tightened its grip around Richmond, the paper printed its hope that:

[T]he Council of this city, at their next meeting, adopt measures which will ensure that none of them who wish to depart shall not be compelled to remain from lack of funds to pay their passage. In no way that we can think of could the city spend one hundred thousand dollars so advantageously as in getting rid of this entire class of our population.

After all, the *Examiner* argued, “they in no way contribute to the public weal. The nearest approach to work they ever make is the keeping of little dram shops and buying stolen goods from negroes.” Anyway, the paper concluded, their departure would allow for more food for “our soldiers and their wives and children” and reduce the numbers of “vicious and unproductive consumers”²⁸ [See Joyce paper, this issue].

Why did the *Examiner* react so violently? The answer: because these women had expressed the ultimate lack of faith in the Confederate national cause. By seeking to leave the besieged Confederate city, they were literally voting with their feet, vividly and publically highlighting the limits of Confederate nationalism. Although they could be dismissed as “Yankee, Dutch, and Irish hags” etc., the reality was that most of the women rioting, buying stolen goods and gouging were native. The Confederate boosters could not face this reality. Some tried to make the foreigners the scapegoat, but they were not the perfect scapegoat, for, although the papers complained about foreigners, they also expressed admiration and gave good coverage to foreign units in service. Even the very critical *Examiner* did so, perhaps under Mitchel’s influence.

The *Charleston Courier*, which had been supportive of the Know-Nothings in the 1850’s, complained about the lack of Irish participation in the Confederate effort in one column, and then, a day or so later, expressed admiration for them in another. A classic example occurred in early 1862, when the newspaper covered the brave actions of the Irish Jasper Greens (the one with all the relatives at St. Vincent’s Academy) at the siege of Fort Pulaski near Savannah. Just two months before, it had published a poem entitled “Yankee Doodle’s ride to Richmond,” with lines attacking the Northern army for including “thieving Yankees, filthy Dutch and Irish from

the Bogs.” The Irish of Charleston and Savannah, were however, apparently not “from the Bogs,” but from one of Savannah’s “favorite companies,” whose commander, one Major Foley, was “an officer of much experience and undoubted gallantry.”

Such a contradiction extended beyond newspapers. Sergeant W. M. Andrews of the First Georgia Infantry (Regulars), for example, who served with and enjoyed the company of Irish soldiers in his own unit, stated, when remembering the Union Irish Brigade’s bloody fight at the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862:

The Confederates are now fighting the World, Burnside having German, Irish, and Italian brigades. . . . Every foreigner who puts his foot on American soil joins the Northern Army, for the sake of the bounty paid, if anything.

Andrews failed to notice the contradiction between his anti-foreign rhetoric and the fact that he himself served with Irish Confederate soldiers.²⁹

Confederate nationalism was basically negative, confused, and contradictory. Those promoting it knew what they *were not*—“Yankees,” or “foreign hirelings”—but not what they *were*. *Their* “foreign hirelings” were not seen as such. Due to the weakness of a Confederate nationalism that never went beyond defending homes and keeping out the North and their “mercenaries,” appeals to the Irish in the South that worked best were not so much those of Confederate nationalism and history so much as they were of Irish nationalism and history. Reminders to the Irish of Oliver Cromwell and the manly tradition of the “fighting Irish” proved to be great motivators; coupled with the support of Catholic clergy, recruiters found them more useful than references to an imagined sense of a common Confederate identity. Ultimately, service in the army was the best way to prove one’s Confederate patriotism. Civilians, Irish and

non-Irish alike, showed it through public support for the cause; however, as shortages hit harder and the war progressed badly, many were busier thinking about how to survive than they were about secession pageants or other forms of Confederate display.³⁰

Laura Edwards in her book, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, believes that “plain folk” women ultimately became, not just anti-War, but anti-Confederate. She contrasts their more open opposition to the cause with that of the private disillusionment of the wealthier planter wives and daughters so ably studied by Drew Faust. Developing a certain class-consciousness, these poorer women declared: “[F]ighting anymore is fighting against God.” Other women—and some men as well—escalated their opposition by actively and openly seeking the overthrow of local Confederate authorities.³¹

Irish men and women on the home front did not have this consciousness; neither did they take up guerrilla action against the new state. Nor were they willing to sacrifice everything on the altar of the new country they found disintegrating before their eyes. When the “Yankees came,” Irish reaction moved quickly from quiet resignation to open acceptance. When New Orleans fell to Union forces in 1862, both Irish newspaper publisher Hugh Kennedy and his editor John Maginnis, both of the *New Orleans True Delta*, although they had supported the Confederacy, thought the new Union commander, Benjamin Butler, deserved a chance to succeed in reviving the city’s moribund economy. Butler, Kennedy and Maginnis reminded their Irish readers, had been a pre-War Democrat in very Whig Massachusetts, and had played a prominent role in fighting the nativist Know-Nothings and abolitionist Republicans in the Bay State.³² This tolerance of the “Beast” Butler made Kennedy and Maginnis no friends among those still fighting for the Confederacy. As early as 1861, one Irish soldier in the Confederate

army had referred to their paper as the “False Delta,” wishing that Louisianans pay no attention to it, and newspaper editors whom soldiers perceived as undermining the cause often felt the wrath of the boys in uniform.

Nonetheless, Butler found many Irish in the city conducive to his rule. John Hughes of Algiers, directly across the Mississippi river from New Orleans, immediately offered his and a number of his staff’s shipbuilding services. One John Murphy, “a loyal citizen of Louisiana,” desired to “strike a blow for the cause of the Union” by raising a company of soldiers for the United States. Another Irishman, one Jeremiah Hurly, informed Butler that some Union associations had been infiltrated by spies who were encouraging men to leave New Orleans and return to Confederate service. As a result of these Irish and other offers, Butler felt confident that he could raise a number of Union companies in the city.³³

New Orleans was not alone in experiencing a loyalty shift among the Irish. In Memphis, Tennessee, too, they played a key role in reestablishing city government under Federal control by collaborating with commanding General William T. Sherman in 1862. The Irish of Savannah, a city which fell to the same Union commander during the Christmas of 1864, were not deterred from holding their first St. Patrick’s Day parade since the beginning of the War the following March, even though some of their fellow countrymen from the city were still serving in Virginia and North Carolina.³⁴

Ultimately, the Irish experience adds another piece to the story of the ambiguous and divided nature of the Confederacy and contradicts the idea of a common national ideology. It also shows that wars do not always and easily afford immigrants, particularly those on the homefront, a chance to “prove” their loyalty to their new home. Internal conflicts seem to

complicate even more the notion of integration/assimilation through military service.³⁵ The Irish Confederate record on the homefront was a mix that ran the gamut from an initial outburst of patriotism to disillusionment, acceptance of defeat, and collaboration with occupying forces. The whole experience had thus not sealed their integration into the dominant native white Protestant society. Of course, native white southerners, too, faced the task of reassessing their identity in the reality of Confederate defeat, Union occupation, and slave emancipation.

At War's end, the Irish, along with other defeated whites, faced the challenge of redefining themselves as southerners and as Americans. Increasingly, they would rely on a racial ideology to do so. It was the era of Reconstruction, rather than the Civil War itself, that would integrate the Irish into the "New South," one with white supremacy, rather than Confederate identity, at its center.

Notes

¹Buttimer, "By Their Deeds," 63-66; O'Connell, *Catholicity*, 515-16; The Rev. C. C. Jones to Mary S. Mallard, Dec. 13, 1860 in Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride*, 634; *Savannah (GA) Daily Morning News*, July 9, 1861; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 77-79.

² Units such as the Irish Companies of the Sixth Louisiana infantry and the Davis Guards of the First Texas Heavy Artillery, and commanders such as Major General Pat Cleburne, did have impacts on major combat between the Union and Confederate forces. Gannon, *Irish Rebels*; Barr, "Texas Coastal Defenses"; Joslyn, ed., *A Meteor Shining Brightly*; Symonds, *Stonewall of*

the West. For the Irish in the Union Army see Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*.

³ See, for example, Sterba, *Good Americans*; Muller, *Free to Die for their Country*.

⁴ Kennedy, ed., *Population of the United States*, 621. For good descriptions of growing sectionalism between North and South and the reasons behind it, see Eaton, *The Mind of the South*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*; Grant, *North Over South*. The depth of this growing sectionalism has been disputed by the late Edward Pessen and downplayed by W. W. Freehling. For the debate, see Pessen, "How different from each other were the Antebellum North and South?" and Freehling *The Road to Disunion, Volume I*. For the build-up to secession and the birth of the Confederacy, see Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume 2: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*; Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*; Rable, *The Confederate Republic*; Bonner, *Mastering America*, esp. 217-51.

⁵ The best examinations of Confederate nationalism are: Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865; The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*.

⁶ For skeptics of Confederate nationalism, see Beringer et al, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, and Beringer, *The Elements of Confederate Defeat*, 23-31, quote on 23; Escott, *After Secession*; Whites, "The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender," 321; Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice."

⁷ Gallagher, *The Confederate War*; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*; Rubin, *Shattered Nation*, 6.

⁸ Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 26-27, 35. For the growth of Irish national identity before 1860, see MacDonagh, *The Emancipist*; O'Connell, ed., *Daniel O'Connell*; Pickering, "Irish First";

Donnelly, “Captain Rock”; Larkin, “The Devotional Revolution”; Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*; Lynch, “Defining Irish Nationalism”; Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland*.

⁹ Regional identity seems to have been stronger in the pre-Famine era, although, even then, American conditions could create a sense of Irish ethnic identity. For an example, see Way, “Evil Humors,” 1420-24. From a later period, the best case study of the negotiation of Irish identity with an American one is Meagher, *Inventing Irish America*.

¹⁰ *Charleston (SC) Catholic Miscellany*, 26 Dec. 1860; *Charleston (SC) Daily Courier*, 17 Sept. 1861.

¹¹ Heisser, “Bishop Lynch’s Civil War Pamphlet.”

¹² Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 96; Bishop John Quinlan Substitute Book; Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 158-60. Verot also earned the title “rebel” for his vocal opposition to papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. See Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, 31-32, 203-14; Bishop Augustin Verot to [Archbishop Francis Patrick Kenrick], 18 Jan. 1861, copy, Bishop Verot Collection; Verot, *A Tract for the Times; A General Catechism*, 20.

¹³ Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee*, 121-22; Durkin, ed., *Confederate Chaplain*; Gleeson, *Rebel Sons of Erin*, 276-77; Tucker, *The Confederacy’s Fighting Chaplain*, 61-156; John Bannon Diary.

¹⁴ Tucker, *The Confederacy’s Fighting Chaplain*, 133, 157-58, 165, 168; Hennon, Jr., *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 23-25; Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 359-60.

¹⁵ Tucker, *The Confederacy’s Fighting Chaplain*, 171-77, 181; Hennon, Jr., *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 105.

¹⁶ Nolan, *St. Mary's of Natchez*, 139-41; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 376; Muster Roll, Hospital No. 1, Confederate Army Papers; O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolina*, 268; Buttimer, "By Their Deeds You Shall Know Them," 75-76.

¹⁷ *Savannah (GA) Daily Morning News*, 20 March 1861.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Hibernian Society of Charleston; *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, 8 May, 23 May, 1861; MacMahon, *Cause and Contrast*; John McFarland to "Emma," 9 October 1860, to Messrs Rankin and Gilmour, 23 Feb. 1861 to Walter Scott, 3. Feb. 1861, to his mother, 21 Aug. 1861, to [Captain Yazoo Rifles], 22 April 1861, to Captain N. Peake, 27 April, 6 June 1861, Blakemore Lizzie McFarland Collection.

¹⁹ Quoted in Dillon, *The Life of John Mitchel*, 2:106. For a succinct view of Genovese's thesis, see his *The Slaveholders Dilemma; Knoxville (TN) Southern Citizen*, 4 Feb. 1858.

²⁰ McGovern, *John Mitchel*, 155-227; *Daily Richmond (VA) Examiner*, 16 Oct. 1863; 16, 19 March 1864; Patrick Condon to P. J. Downing, 31 March 1866, Fenian Brotherhood Records; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 17 March 1876.

²¹ Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers who served in Organizations from the State of Mississippi.

²² Buttimer, "By Their Deeds You Shall Know Them," 64-66; *Charleston (SC) Daily Courier*, 16 Sept. 1861; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 96; "Recollections of a Confederate Soldier."

²³ Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 205-206; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*, 53-64.

²⁴ Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers who Served in Organizations from the

State of Virginia, First Virginia Infantry Regiment; Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Longman, 2000), 141.

²⁵Dew, *Ironmaker to the Confederacy*, 234-39; Davies, C. S. *Armory Richmond*, 133.

²⁶H. Pinckney Walker to Lord (John) Russell, 13 July 1863, 19 July 1864, Foreign Office Records (hereafter FO), 5/907, 5/909; Lonm, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 391-95.

²⁷George Moore to Lord Lyons, 6 June 1863, FO 5/909; Lonm, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 395-400; *Camden (SC) Confederate*, 1 July 1863; [Magrath] *Three Letters*.

²⁸*Daily Richmond (VA) Examiner* Sept. 24, 28 Sept., 19, 22 Oct. 19, 24 Nov. 1863, 26 Jan., 10 June, 8 July 1864; Kimball, "The Bread Riot," 152-53; Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?" 131-75.

²⁹Lonm, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 390-94, 406-410; *Charleston (SC) Tri-Weekly Courier*, 15 Feb. 15 April 1862; Andrews, *Footprints of a Regiment*, 99.

³⁰Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight*, 178; Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy*, 161-69.

³¹Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 85-99; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*. For active opposition, see Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 93-130 and Dyer, *Secret Yankees*.

³²*New Orleans Daily True Delta*, 12, 22 Sept. 1862. The best work on Union occupation in the Confederacy is Ash, *When the Yankees Came*. For Butler and New Orleans, see Hearn, *When the Devil Came Down to Dixie*; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 7-8; Trefousse, *Ben Butler*, 107-34; Nash, *Stormy Petrel*, 136-77; Nolan, *Benjamin Franklin Butler*, 150-225;

³³Edward Murphy to W. H. Renaud, 1 June, 16 Aug. 1861, Murphy Family Papers. Confederate troops that were being transported through Raleigh, North Carolina, took it upon themselves to

attack the offices of W. W. Holden's "peace" newspaper, *The Standard*. Clark, *Railroads in the Civil War*, 110-112; John Hughes to Benjamin Butler, 13 May 1862, Joseph P. Murphy to Benjamin Butler, 12 May 1862, Jeremiah Hurly to Benjamin Butler 1 Aug. 1862, Benjamin Butler to Henry Halleck, 27 Aug. 1862, Benjamin Butler Papers.

³⁴ Capers, *The Biography of a River Town*, 148-49, 157-59; Marszalek, *Sherman*, 191-93; Parks, "Memphis under Military Rule," 50-58; *Savannah Daily Herald*, 18 March 1865.

³⁵ Irish civilians in the North, for example, could also undermine the "patriotic efforts of Irish soldiers at the front. See Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, and Edward K. Spann, "Union Green," 193-209.

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