Boston College

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'LIVE IRELAND, PERISH THE EMPIRE:' IRISH NATIONALIST
ANTI-IMPERIALISM c. 1840-1900

a dissertation

by

NIAMH C. LYNCH

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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The Dissertation of: _____ Niamh C. Lynch_____

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ABSTRACT

"Live Ireland, Perish the Empire:" Irish Nationalist Anti-Imperialism c. 1840-1900

Niamh C. Lynch

Directors: Professors Kevin Kenny and Kevin O'Neill

Anti-imperialism was a persistent theme within Irish nationalist political ideology from the mid-nineteenth century up to and including the South African War in 1899-1902. Irish nationalist anti-imperialism was not reflexive Anglophobia, but rather was the product of a considered and sophisticated ideological critique of empire that had developed over the course of several decades. Anti-imperialism emerged as a theme among moderate and radical elements of the nationalist movement, and it was an important component of nationalist discourse both in Ireland and the United States. The Introduction outlines existing scholarship on the relationship between Irish nationalism and anti-imperialism, and it suggests that our understanding of that relationship is incomplete because few scholars have studied nationalism's intellectual engagement with empire.

Chapter One focuses on the two individuals responsible for defining the terms of Irish anti-imperial discourse, Thomas Davis and John Mitchel. Together they definitively established anti-imperialism as a legitimate strand of nationalist political ideology. Chapter Two demonstrates that in the aftermath of Mitchel's death, the most radical Irish anti-imperialism developed not in Ireland, but among nationalists in the United States. It establishes the contours of Irish-American political identity and explains how it shaped a

sophisticated economic and political critique of imperialism between 1870 and 1900. Chapter Three demonstrates that several individuals associated with the Irish Parliamentary Party also made an important contribution to Irish anti-imperial discourse. Alongside Michael Davitt, the Parnellites re-oriented mainstream nationalist discourse away from any tendency toward identification with the metropolitan imperial perspective. The Irish nationalist response to the Second South African War forms the basis of Chapter Four. Although advanced nationalists remained on the margins of Irish politics at the war's end, they had used the conflict to establish themselves, rather than the Home Rule Party, as heirs to the anti-imperial nationalism first articulated by Davis and Mitchel. The Epilogue details how, in the early twentieth century, advanced nationalists participated in a nuanced and sophisticated discussion about the precise meaning of anti-imperialism in an Irish framework.

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Introduction – "Live Ireland, Perish the Empire"[1]

This dissertation demonstrates that anti-imperialism was a persistent and explicit

theme within Irish nationalist political ideology from the 1840s through the turn of the

twentieth century. Anti-imperialism was not confined to one strand of nationalist

thought. It emerged as a theme among moderate and radical elements of the nationalist

movement both in Ireland and the United States. Irish nationalist anti-imperialism

changed over time and it had both radical and reactionary elements. In its most sweeping

form Irish anti-imperial discourse provided the framework for a broad-based critique of

many of the political, economic, and social doctrines associated with nineteenth-century

liberalism. Most significantly, it linked imperial exploitation with the doctrine of

political economy. It also asserted the universal applicability of the principle of national

self-determination, and it linked the cause of Ireland with that of other peoples struggling

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[1] The title phrase "Live Ireland, Perish the Empire" appeared several times in *The Nation* in the 1840s when that paper was edited by Thomas Davis and later, John Mitchel. In 1899, Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* again picked up the phrase and declared it to be the very "watch-word of patriotism." (*United Irishman*, 4 March 1899). It was attributed to the eighteenth-century Irish parliamentarian Henry Grattan. Neither Davis nor Griffith specified its precise origin, but the phrase appears to come from an address Grattan made in the Irish parliament on 12 August 1785. Grattan's actual words on that day were "perish the Empire! - live the Constitution!" See William Woodfall, *An Impartial sketch of the debate in the House of Commons of Ireland, on a motion made on Friday, August 12, 1785, by the Rt. Hon. Thomas Orde* (Dublin: Luke White Publisher, 1785), 32.

against imperial domination, British and otherwise. In its more reactionary incarnations, Irish anti-imperialism could shade into Anglo-phobic paranoia, a defense of chattel slavery in the United States, and into anti-Semitism. The line between the two strains of anti-imperialism was not fixed, and the most dominant strand of the discourse, that associated with John Mitchel, featured both radical and reactionary undercurrents.

Ireland's historical relationship to the British Empire has been the focus of a great deal of scholarly interest, particularly in the last twenty years. The histories generated in that time have successfully captured many of the complexities of the relationship just as they have demonstrated the way in which that relationship changed over time. Several important anthologies have contributed to our understanding of the scope and depth of Ireland's engagement with empire. Covering mostly the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Keith Jeffrey's *An Irish Empire?* includes essays on Ireland's cultural engagement with imperialism (one on film, one on sport) as well as an important chapter on the Irish tradition of military service in the imperial forces. Several of the book's other essays focus on Ulster and Unionist attitudes to the Empire. T.G Fraser's chapter on "Ireland and India" is the only one that deals specifically (although indirectly) with Irish nationalist political ideology. Fraser acknowledges Irish MP Frank Hugh O'Donnell's extensive interaction with Indian nationalists in 1880s London, but his larger thesis is that the level of Irish participation in the administration of India is far more indicative of the true relationship between the Irish and the Indian people at this time than

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any fleeting pan-nationalist solidarity might suggest.[2] The nationalist discourse on empire is not evaluated on its own account.

Kevin Kenny's recent anthology *Ireland and the British Empire* very effectively demonstrates the "shifting meanings of Empire, imperialism, and colonialism in Irish history over time."[3] It places particular emphasis on the nature and extent of Irish participation in the imperial project whether as migrants, military personnel, missionaries, or administrators. Two of the essays, those by Alvin Jackson and Deirdre McMahon, consider broadly the relationship between Irish nationalists and the Empire. While both clearly demonstrate the extent to which nationalists were attuned to imperial considerations and imperial politics, they do not, on the whole, consider imperialism in the context of nationalist political ideology. That question is addressed specifically (although in passing) in a third essay in which, in the course of a review of the historiography, Stephen Howe asserts that "little explicitly 'anti-imperial' thought or writing of a global or general kind is to be found in nineteenth or early twentieth-century Irish nationalism."[4]

Howe's earlier *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* is one of the few studies of Irish imperial attitudes in which nationalist political

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[2] Keith Jeffery, ed. *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

[3] Kevin Kenny, ed. *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), preface. See Alvin Jackson's "Ireland, the Union and the Empire, 1800-1960," and Deirdre McMahon's, "Ireland, the Empire, and the Commonwealth." Simon J. Potter's (ed.) *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004) includes several essays on Irish newspapers coverage of imperial events.

[4] Stephen Howe, "Historiography," in Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire*, 232.

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ideology is treated as a discrete category of investigation.[5] He once again comes to largely negative conclusions about the extent to which nineteenth-century Irish nationalist ideology can be said to have been anti-imperial. Howe's thesis is not based on explicit evidence that Irish nationalists were indifferent to or supported imperialism, but rather, on his own observation that because most nationalists attacked the Empire with Irish interests foremost on their mind, their motives cannot be described as genuinely anti-imperialist. By this definition, no nationalist movement (in Ireland, India, or anywhere else) would qualify as anti-imperialist, making it difficult to provide a meaningful historical explanation as to why the British Empire collapsed at all.

The Irish nationalist political discourse on empire has also received direct attention in other more narrowly focused studies of Irish attitudes to specific imperial issues and questions. By far the most common approach in this regard has been to examine the way in which the Irish wrote and spoke about British imperialism in India.[6] Studies of the Irish response to the Second South African War (1899-1902) represent another common historical line of inquiry in which nationalist political ideology has

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[5] Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also, David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* ed. Andrew Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 494-521; Donald Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto: P.D. Meaney Co., 1996).

[6] S.B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities: Nineteenth Century Analogies and Exchanges Between India and Ireland* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993); T.G. Fraser, "Ireland and India," in Keith Jeffery ed., *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Michael Silvestri, "'The Sinn Féin of India': Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal," *Journal of British Studies* 39 no. 4 (2000): 454-486; Howard Brasted, "Irish Models and the Indian National Congress, 1870-1922," *South Asia* (Australia) 1985, 8 (1-2): 24-45; Howard Brasted, "Indian Nationalist Development and the Influence of Irish Home Rule, 1870-1886," *Modern Asian Studies*, 14, no. 1 (1980): 37-63; C.A. Bayly, "Ireland, India, and the Empire: 1780-1914," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* [GB] 10 (2000): 377-397; Richard Davis, "Thomas Davis and the Indian Empire: the Liberalism of Young Ireland," *Journal of Indian History* (India) 58, no. 1-3 (1980): 75-91; Mary Cumpston, "Some Early Indian Nationalists and their Allies in the British Parliament, 1851-1906," *English Historical Review*, 76, no. 299 (1961): 279-297.

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featured.[7] Historians have also focused on individual nationalists who took an interest in imperial affairs and imperial politics (in particular Thomas Davis and Michael Davitt).[8] What these three approaches have confirmed is that nineteenth-century Irish nationalists were keenly attuned to events in other parts of the Empire, and that they were, in general, critical of British administration and policy in these regions.

As valuable as they are, these studies have not considered nationalist political ideology as an ongoing discourse. They leave the impression, as a result, that Irish nationalists only objected to specific instances of imperial excess, and that they did not discuss the nature of imperialism or the implications of empire beyond analysis of these specific examples. While we learn, for instance, that Irish nationalists often made parallels between imperial maladministration in Ireland and India, we are left wondering whether such thinking was part of a broader nationalist discourse on imperialism, or whether it merely reflected political opportunism or idiosyncratic personal interest. Irish anti-imperialism emerges as a patchwork of ideas without any discernable pattern or common thread.

The formula in many existing studies of Irish anti-imperialism has been to acknowledge nationalist criticism of imperial policy but then juxtapose this with a

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[7] Donal McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2003). (First published as *The Irish Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town: Perskor Publishers, 1989); Donal Lowry, "Nationalist and Unionist Responses to the British Empire in the Age of the South African War, 1899-1902," in Potter ed., *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain*: 159-176; Patrick Maume, "The *Irish Independent* and Empire, 1891-1919," in Potter ed., *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain*: 124-142.

[8] R. Davis, "Thomas Davis and the Indian Empire:" 75-91; Carla King, "Michael Davitt, Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," in *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837-1901*, ed. Peter Gray (UK: Four Courts Press, 2004); Howard Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750-1959* eds. MacDonagh and Mandle (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

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discussion of the extent of Irish participation in the imperial project (in itself an important

part of the story). This, intentionally or not, creates the suggestion that to whatever

extent there was an anti-imperial discourse within Irish nationalism, it was historically

insignificant. The present study builds on existing literature and it accepts implicitly that

the Irish participated in large numbers in the imperial project. Just as the "fact of

imperial service, in itself, neither negates nor supports claims about [Ireland's] colonial

status," neither does it diminish the validity and significance of anti-imperialism as a

strand of nationalist political ideology.[9]

This study is not an examination of Irish public opinion. The opinions considered

here are those of a relatively narrow elite within Irish nationalism; an elite composed of

individuals who nonetheless often set the terms of broader political discourse. Although

some worked at the highest levels of nationalist politics, most of those considered here

contributed to nationalist discourse through their work in journalism. They sought to

define, through their writing, a nationalist political ideology that acknowledged and

incorporated Ireland's imperial context.

The term "anti-imperialist," as it used in this study, is not interchangeable with

the term "separatist." Although the majority of those who contributed to Irish anti-

imperial discourse were separatists (that is, they wanted to completely sever ties with

Britain), others sought to re-define the British Empire along lines compatible with Irish

nationality and, thus, with continued Irish imperial membership. Neither were all

advanced nationalists necessarily anti-imperial in an explicit way. For some separatists,

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[9] Kevin Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire," in Kenny ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, 94.

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anti-imperialism went without saying (and, thus, they did not contribute to the anti-imperial discourse), while others simply did not consider anti-imperialism a useful or relevant mode of nationalist agitation.

Chapter One demonstrates how, beginning in the 1840s, Thomas Davis and John Mitchel definitively established anti-imperialism as a legitimate strand of nationalist political ideology. Davis denied that Ireland was Britain's imperial partner, arguing instead that the country was a subjugated and exploited dependency. He believed that empire was a conspiracy against nationality, and that in destroying nationality, imperialism robbed Ireland both of its traditions and of its future. Davis's writing belies the claim that "early Irish nationalists hardly ever identified their situation or cause with that of other, non-European subject peoples in the British Empire or beyond."[10] His journalism regularly focused on other regions of Britain's Empire and he spoke repeatedly of the need for solidarity between Irish nationalists and those fighting imperialism in other parts of the world. Thomas Davis established anti-imperialism as an important current in Irish nationalist political ideology.

If Davis supplied the fundamentals of anti-imperial language, it was John Mitchel whose economic and cultural critique of imperialism was to have the broadest appeal among successive generations of nationalists. Mitchel initially framed his rejection of empire in much the same way as had Davis, but his anti-imperialism was sharpened and hardened in the context both of the Irish Famine in the 1840s and his experience in the United States in the 1850s and 1860s. Mitchel blamed the Famine on British political

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[10] Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 44.

economy, a doctrine he believed was at the heart of all imperial exploitation. The British

Empire, he argued, existed for the exclusive benefit of a grasping oligarchy whose intent

it was to spread liberal political, economic, and social practices as widely as possible.

Those liberal practices in turn facilitated a more efficient exploitation of labor and

resources, whether among peasants in Ireland or among the working class of the United

States. It was in America that Mitchel more fully developed his antipathy to nineteenth-

century liberalism. While there, he became an outspoken defender of American chattel

slavery. If in many ways the quintessential conservative, Mitchel also challenged

established pieties insomuch as both his defense of plantation slavery and his hatred of

empire were in part based on a radical economic and social critique of international

capitalism and of the system of "free labor." Irish nationalist anti-imperialism would be

defined, to a great extent, along the lines he set in the 1850s and 1860s.

I argue in Chapter Two that in the immediate aftermath of John Mitchel's death,

the most radical Irish anti-imperialism was found not among nationalists in Ireland, but

among those in the United States. The chapter begins by establishing the contours of

Irish-American political discourse. In the 1880s, that discourse echoed Mitchel's critique

of political economy insomuch as it conceived an explicit connection between

imperialism and exploitative capitalism. The basis of Irish-American anti-imperialism

changed in the 1890s, however, when the United States itself began to pursue an imperial

policy. Irish-American anti-imperialism at that time shifted toward a defense of

Catholicism and of republicanism. A final section of the chapter outlines the (largely

negative) response among nationalists in Ireland to the advent of American imperialism.

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Chapter Three establishes that nationalists in Ireland had their own variety of anti-imperialism in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the late 1870s, a number of Irish MPs broke ranks with the parliamentary leadership and made a critique of empire central to their more aggressive policy at Westminster. Charles Stewart Parnell's Irish Party depicted itself as the defender of nationality, whether in Ireland, India, Egypt, or South Africa. The Home Rulers were not separatists and their concept of nationality was fully compatible with continued Irish membership in the British Empire (on revised terms). Although its overall program was relatively moderate, the Irish Party's focus on the Empire represented an important contribution to Irish anti-imperial discourse. Irish outspokenness on imperial questions marked a break in precedent and the party's policy of explicitly identifying with the colonized rather than with the colonizers imbued its stance with an inherent radicalism.

Sometime Parnellite Michael Davitt added a social and economic dimension to the parliamentary anti-imperial critique when he linked reform of the British Empire to the question of social and political reform within Britain itself. Democratic reform within British society, he believed, would form the basis for a reconceived empire founded on cooperation and mutual benefit rather than exploitation. Taken together, both Davitt and the Parnellites were responsible for re-orienting nationalist discourse away from any tendency toward identification with the metropolitan imperial perspective. For a small number of advanced nationalists, however, even Davitt's more far-reaching critique of empire was not enough. In the period immediately preceding the Second South African War, some Irish nationalists rediscovered Mitchel's critique of imperialism and his

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hostility toward British liberalism in particular. This group included both cultural nationalists and Socialists, a coalition of which would form the vanguard of the Irish pro-Boer movement in 1899. That coalition defined an uncompromising anti-imperialism that would long outlast the South African War.

The Irish nationalist response to the South African War forms the basis of Chapter Four. Pro-Boer sentiment was common to virtually all strata of nationalist opinion in Ireland. The Irish portrayed the Boers as waging a national struggle parallel to their own and they accused the British government of declaring war on a nation of unoffending farmers at the bidding of an international conspiracy of financiers. Irish nationalists did not, on the whole, address the question of native oppression in South Africa. In this respect they were typical of many (though not all) of the war's critics, for whom the question of native rights was at most a secondary consideration. The anti-war discourse in Ireland was also typical of broader opinion in the sense that it contained an anti-Semitic undercurrent. The belief that the war had been orchestrated on behalf of a cabal of financiers easily meshed with existing anti-Semitic propaganda in which Jews were believed the driving force behind international capitalism.

The outbreak of war spurred an immediate and hostile response among the majority of Irish nationalists. The newly formed Irish Transvaal Committee brought together a coalition of advanced nationalists committed to capitalizing on the Irish people's strong sympathy with the Boers. The South African War marked the beginning of a period in which advanced nationalists began to portray the mainstream nationalist establishment (that is, the Home Rule movement) as out of step with Irish opinion on the

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broader imperial question. They characterized the constitutionalists as pro-Boer rather

than truly anti-imperial, and they argued that Home Rule would not represent a break

with the British Empire. Although at the war's end Arthur Griffith and James Connolly

were still on the margins of Irish politics, they had wrought control of anti-imperial

discourse and had established themselves as heirs to the anti-imperial nationalism first

articulated by Thomas Davis and John Mitchel. While it may not have appeared so at the

time, Griffith and Connolly emerged from the war with the ideological advantage in the

sense that they were now identified as the most anti-imperial element within Irish

nationalism.

The epilogue briefly explores Irish anti-imperialism in the early twentieth century.

It demonstrates that Irish nationalists continued their anti-imperial discourse long after

the South African War had ended. Advanced nationalists in these years, in fact,

participated in a nuanced and sophisticated discussion about the precise meaning of anti-

imperialism in an Irish context. Significantly, both radical and conservative anti-

imperialists were informed by John Mitchel's earlier anti-imperial critique. The position

he had defined proved meaningful to a broad section of nationalist opinion and Irish anti-

imperialism in the early twentieth century retained both his critique of cosmopolitanism

and his critique of economic liberalism.

Anti-imperialism was a persistent, explicit, and coherent theme within Irish

nationalist political ideology from the mid-nineteenth century up to and including the

South African War in 1899-1902. That conflict served to focus and harden an

aggressively separatist anti-imperialism that while it had existed within Irish nationalist

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political ideology since the 1840s had yet to find concrete expression. The 1916 Rising,

in so far as it was an expression of nationalist political ideology, may be understood as

the articulation of Irish anti-imperialism. The public response to the Rising, moreover,

suggests that anti-imperialism appealed to a much broader section of the Irish population

than either the British government or the Irish Parliamentary Party might have supposed.

Public resentment at the harsh British response to the Rising was a factor in the post-1916

decline of constitutional nationalism. It must also be acknowledged, however, that the

mainstream nationalist movement had ceased to reflect nationalist political ideology

because it did not and could not reflect its anti-imperialism.

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Chapter I

Defining Irish Anti-Imperialism: Thomas Davis and John Mitchel

The English are not more sanguinary and atrocious than any other people would be in like case, and under like exigencies ... the disarmament, degradation, extermination and periodical destruction of the Irish people are measures of policy dictated, not by pure malignity, but by the imperious requirements of the *system* of Empire administered in London ... they must go on ... while the British Empire goes on – and ... there is no remedy for them under Heaven save the dismemberment of that Empire. - John Mitchel (1860)[1]

This chapter argues that between 1840 and 1875 a comprehensive critique of

imperialism became an increasingly important motif within Irish nationalist discourse.

In an era when romantic nationalism emphasized the organic nation, imperialism

appeared to demand an unnatural and destructive cosmopolitanism. Ireland, nationalists

argued, did not benefit from Britain's global Empire, did not share its sanguinary thirst

for wider dominion, and could not fulfill its national destiny while bound to a system in

which metropolitan exigencies would always take priority over national considerations.

Imperialism, moreover, came to be seen as inextricably tied to political and economic

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[1] John Mitchel, *An Apology for the British Government in Ireland* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1920), v-vi (Originally published in 1860).

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liberalism, an ideology linked in many Irish minds to the cataclysmic Famine of the 1840s.

The period 1840 to 1875 is, for a number of reasons, a fitting place to begin to explore the development of Irish anti-imperialism. These were years of unprecedented British imperial activity - in Afghanistan, India, China, the Crimea, Southern Africa, and New Zealand. In every corner of the world, the British moved to spread or consolidate imperial power, boost imperial trade and, sometimes, to quell imperial dissent. The Empire had been a feature of political discourse in Ireland since the time of the Act of Union in 1801. Supporters of the Act understood the constitutional union of Ireland and England as the beginning of an "imperial partnership," and they welcomed "the prospect of a strengthened Empire."[2] Indeed, the very meaning of the term the "British Empire" changed in this period. Before the mid-nineteenth century, the phrase described a relatively loose sphere of British economic, and to a lesser extent, political and cultural influence.[3] Colonial policy in this period was "reactive and pragmatic" in the sense that it was largely (though not always) driven by mercantilist considerations, rather than a desire to control through formal governance or colonization. By the 1840s, however, British imperialism was both more authoritarian and more ideologically driven.[4] The

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[2] Thomas Bartlett, "Ireland, Empire, and Union, 1690-1801," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82-83. The Act of Union abolished Ireland's semi-autonomous parliament in Dublin (Grattan's Parliament) and provided for 100 Irish MPs in Westminster. Imperial considerations might be said to have played a role in the British Government's decision to abolish the Dublin legislature. The loss of the American colonies made the Irish parliament an imperial anomaly. See Kevin Kenny, "Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, 9.
[3] Initially the term applied to just the kingdoms of Britain and Ireland. Gradually, it came to include settler colonies in North America and eventually commercial outposts and protectorates in Asia.
[4] Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman Group, 1989), 249-250.

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term the "British Empire" came to describe an increasingly formalized system of British governance extending to territories in Asia, the Antipodes, Africa, the Americas, and Europe. If the rationale behind British imperialism became more ideologically complex in these years, so too did the Irish nationalist response to that imperialism. The expansion and redefinition of the imperial project made the Irish question more urgent in the sense that Ireland was constitutionally at the center of now not just a commercial, but a vast political empire. Both the Irish and the British were, in this regard, increasingly inclined to see the Irish Question as an imperial one.[5]

In addition to being a period of imperial growth and re-definition, the period 1840 to 1875 was one of increased Irish imperial participation. Whether as migrants, missionaries, military personnel, or administrators, the mid-nineteenth century Irish took part in the imperial project in much greater numbers than ever before. From a historical point of view, of course, there was "nothing anomalous in members of one colonized people helping to govern their homeland, or to conquer and govern another country elsewhere in the same Empire."[6] Nonetheless, the extent of Irish involvement in explicitly imperial activity such as soldiering was potentially awkward for those who argued that the Irishman had more in common with the Indian or the Egyptian than he had with the Englishman. It remained to be seen whether a people so deeply implicated in the imperial project would respond to a nationalist vision based on a rejection of the Empire. Thomas Davis believed that they would, once it was made clear to them that the

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[5] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century," 83; John Molony, *A Soul Came Into Ireland: Thomas Davis 1814-1845 - A Biography* (Dublin: Geography, 1995), 154.
[6] Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, 93.

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Empire cost the Irish much more than it could ever provide in terms of jobs or trade. The British Empire, Davis argued, had robbed Ireland of a national arena in which its citizens might realize their business and political potential, and through which they might regenerate Irish national life and the Irish economy.[7] Other nationalists claimed that the deficiencies of the colonial economy itself contributed to the relatively large number of Irishmen forced to find employment in imperial service. Nationalist writers in this period campaigned against Irish military enlistment and imperial "place-grubbing" in bodies such as the Indian Civil Service.[8] More broadly, they attempted to redirect the Irish gaze away the imperial and toward the national.

Finally, the period 1840 to 1875 spans the public careers of the two men who did most to redefine Ireland's relationship to the British Empire in the nineteenth century: Thomas Davis (1814-1845) and John Mitchel (1815-1875). Although not the first proponents of such an approach, Davis and Mitchel definitively established anti-imperialism as a legitimate strand of nationalist discourse.[9] Throughout their public lives, both men sought to adjust the Irish perspective by repeatedly insisting that, far from

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[7] *The Nation*, 14 September and 12 October 1844.

[8] Thomas Davis, *An Address Read Before the Historical Society, Dublin on 26th June 1840 by Thomas Davis Esq. A.B. Barrister at Law, President of the Society* (Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1840), 44; Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 510. One quarter of all successful applications to the ICS in the second half of the nineteenth century were Irish (Protestants made up eighty per cent of this group).

[9] R. Davis, "Thomas Davis and the Indian Empire," 77. Edmund Burke had been one of the most prominent critics of British misgovernment in India. Although he would not have approved of Davis and Mitchel's nationalism, he had nonetheless established a tradition whereby an Irishman might feel entitled and qualified to comment on imperial questions. Thomas Davis was particularly fond of quoting Burke's observation that England "had never made a Treaty in India which she did not break" (*The Nation*, 7 January 1843). See also Frederick Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 8; Katherine O'Donnell, "'Whether White People Like it or Not': Edmund Burke's Speeches on India – Caoineadh 's Cáinte," *Éire Ireland*, 37, no. 3 (2002): 187-206; Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 153-189.

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being an equal member, or even a poor relation of the metropolitan family, Ireland was in fact a smaller India, its national territory and "soul" shackled in imperial irons. While both men proceeded from a similar set of nationalist assumptions, their arguments against imperialism ultimately took quite different forms. Davis believed that empire was the antithesis of nation; that it inevitably produced an unnatural conformity at the expense of an individual nation's unique identity and destiny. Partly to demonstrate that Ireland's problems were not the result of some failing peculiar to the Irish, Davis consciously looked for parallels between Irish history and that of other British colonies. His investigations convinced him that every component of nationality was sapped of its vitality when politics, literature, art, language, and trade was oriented toward anything other than the nation.

Mitchel shared this romantic nationalist perspective, although he went on to place greater emphasis on the immediate economic repercussions of imperialism than did Davis. Mitchel viewed empire as a vehicle for the doctrine of political economy, and he argued that the exploitation of labor and resources it demanded was devastating at both a national and individual level. The economic component of his anti-imperialism came into focus for him in the context both of the Irish Famine and the debate on American chattel slavery. In terms, however, of his initial rejection of empire, Mitchel owed a great intellectual debt to his friend Thomas Davis.

17

I – Thomas Davis, Irish Nationalism, and the Empire

One of the key figures in the Young Ireland movement, Davis was born in County

Cork in 1814, educated at Trinity College, Dublin and called to the Bar in 1838. His

family was staunchly Unionist and there is some evidence that in his early twenties,

Davis's own politics were quite typical of someone with his Protestant Ascendancy

background. By 1840, however, he was unequivocal in his nationalism and was

increasingly drawn toward Daniel O'Connell's movement for the repeal of the Act of

Union.[10] The circumstances surrounding his apparent conversion to nationalism are

somewhat unclear. The theory that it sprang from a Continental journey, however, has

been dismissed for lack of evidence, although there were many parallels between his

thinking and that of European romantic nationalists.[11] Whatever the origin of his change

of heart there can be no doubt about the depth of his conviction: in a public career that

lasted little more than five years, Thomas Davis became the embodiment of Irish

nationalism to such an extent, indeed, that virtually every subsequent nationalist leader

identified him as a source of inspiration.[12]

Had Davis known just how little time he would actually have, it would have been

impossible for him to work at a greater pace than he did. His career spanned only the few

years between his matriculation from Trinity and his sudden death in 1845 at the age of

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[10] The campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union was led by Daniel O'Connell, the barrister who had successfully lobbied for Catholic emancipation in 1829.

[11] Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 311.

[12] Molony, *A Soul*, 16; Charles Gavan Duffy, *The Memoirs of an Irish Patriot 1840-1846* (London: Paul Trench, Trubner and Co., 1890), 10-11; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 311; Thomas Davis, *Thomas Davis: The Thinker and Teacher - The Essence of His Writings in Prose and Poetry*, ed. Arthur Griffith (Dublin: M.H.

just thirty. In that time, Davis became a formidable polemicist and later, the editor of the

most widely read newspaper in the country, the *Nation*. The paper was the heart of the

Young Ireland movement, a new nationalist organization that, while initially allied with

the Repealers, eventually rejected O'Connell's cautious approach in favor of a more

strident nationalism.[13]

Young Ireland ideology resembled the romantic nationalism then ascendant in

many parts of Europe. Like so many of his continental counterparts, Davis viewed the

nation as "a natural organic community, the product of a unique tradition, culture and

geography whose legitimacy was not based merely on rights but more importantly on

passions inculcated by nature and history."[14] He and his fellow Young Irelanders were

part of a university-educated elite, and much of their program centered on a revival of

Irish literature and culture. Ireland, Davis argued, had been exposed to hundreds of years

of Anglicization, the intent of which had been to make the Irish people forget that they

had a culture that was distinct from that of Britain. Among his contemporaries, he was

the most insistent on the need to stimulate national consciousness through an aggressive

course of education, or as he called it, "mind-making."[15] The leadership's task was to

awaken national consciousness by providing instruction on, among other topics, Irish

history and culture, as well as on the virtues of active citizenship. Davis's famous

exhortation, "gentlemen, you have a country!" was intended to re-orient the Irishman's

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Gill, 1914), preface.

[13] Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), 64.

[14] Molony, *A Soul*, 25; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 311-312; Thomas Davis, *Literary and Historical Essays 1846*, ed. Charles Gavan Duffy (Dublin: James Duffy, 1846), republished with an introduction by John Kelly (Washington DC: Woodstock Books, 1998), 6; Seán Ryder, "Speaking Of '98: Young Ireland and Republican Memory," *Éire Ireland*, 34 no. 2 (1999), 52.

business, political, and cultural gaze back to the land of his birth.[16] If the power of the national "soul" could be harnessed, Davis believed, Ireland would inevitably see a spiritual, economic, political, and artistic regeneration. His energetic nationalism caught the imagination of his contemporaries.

Davis's emphasis on an essential Irishness, when combined with weekly newspaper sermons on Celtic superiority, could sometimes appear as a shrill ethnocentrism. Even at the time, the *Nation* was accused by critics of using "historical reminiscences [to foster] national animosities." According to his colleague, Charles Gavan Duffy, however, Davis "ransacked the past, not to find weapons of assault on England ... but to rear a generation whose lives would be strengthened and ennobled by the knowledge that there had been great men of their race and great actions done on the soil they trod."[17] A survey of Davis's writing supports the claim that he was more concerned with boosting Ireland than with deliberately attacking Britain. He believed each nation had a distinct identity and that to develop Ireland's was not to undermine that of the British. The only aspect of Britishness that was problematic was the policy of imperialism, which, by definition, impinged upon the nationality of others. Britishness was a fine thing at home, but he believed it to be an unnatural phenomenon in Ireland.

The smothering of Irish nationality, Davis believed, was more than a question of damaged national pride. The absence of national spirit invariably resulted in second-rate institutions, a flaccid economy, and an unremarkable literary and artistic environment.

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[15] Duffy, *Memoirs*, 318.
[16] T. Davis, *An Address*, quoted in Duffy, *Memoirs*, 37.
[17] Duffy, *Memoirs*, 138-140.

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Self-rule, Davis argued, was "the best stimulant of ambition, the best patron of industry, literature, and art, and the best guardian of public virtue."[18] Educating a public that was not initially inclined to make the connection between imperialism and broad national decline would demand every minute of his time.

Davis's entry into the field of nationalist politics was not particularly auspicious. In 1837 he gave an address to the Dublin Historical Society in which he highlighted the British tendency to use the "divide and conquer" principle in both India and Ireland. He also drew a parallel between the Boer treatment of African natives and the British policy of clearing the Irish off the land.[19] In June 1840, as the outgoing president of the Historical Society at Trinity College, Davis made an address, which, while it initially appeared to take up the subject of curriculum reform at the college, ultimately turned into a challenge to his audience to embrace their Irishness. Arthur Griffith, writing in 1914 about this particular address, would celebrate it as the first call to the Irish "to turn their faces from the false lights of Cosmopolitanism."[20] Davis acknowledged in the speech that he was addressing the very segment of the population that had traditionally benefited most from the connection with Britain.[21] Whatever rewards or recognition they received in this capacity, however, was small compensation for the damage they were doing their country, and he urged them to resist the temptation to accept the "gold and place of a foreign court."[22] Insisting that whether they were Catholic or Protestant, they were first

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[18] *The Nation*, 12 October 1844.
[19] Molony, *A Soul*, 28.
[20] Arthur Griffith (ed.) in T. Davis, *Thomas Davis*, preface, vi.
[21] The vast majority of students at Trinity College were members of the Protestant Ascendancy. As a group, they had a strong tradition of imperial service.
[22] T. Davis, *An Address*, 44.

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and foremost Irishmen, he implored them to devote their lives and careers to the benefit of that small island which had "none to aid her" but her own sons.[23] The implication of this last point is that the British government would never of its own accord address Irish needs, and that the Union therefore was an injustice and a sham. If Ireland was going to raise itself up, it would have to be at the expense of that connection.

Davis was pleasantly surprised by the reception his address received and this encouragement may have been a consideration in his decision to delve deeper into the question of Irish nationality. Around this time he wrote occasional articles for a small monthly magazine entitled the *Citizen* (later the *Dublin Monthly* magazine) in which he appeared to first experiment with the idea of nationalism as anti-imperialism. The articles had titles such as "India – Her Own and Another's" and "Who are the Afghans? And Why Should Irishmen fight with Them?"[24] Davis was clearly developing a model of nationalism that was implicitly anti-imperial. The following year he and his friend John Dillon succeeded in convincing the proprietor of the daily *Morning Register* to hand over to them, as an experiment, control of the editorial page. In the three months in which they worked on the *Register*, the men sought to transform it from a mouthpiece of Dublin Castle (the center of British administration in Ireland) to a rallying point for nationality. Davis believed that the secret to reviving Irish nationality was to get the support of the most influential and wealthiest segment of the population: his fellow Protestants. It was a daunting proposition, and he and Dillon had limited success in peddling the "new principles" to a readership unaccustomed to either nationalism or anti-imperialism.

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[23] Ibid., 46.

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One of Davis's earliest anti-imperial themes took shape during the few months he spent at the *Morning Register,* however. Over the course of several weeks, he focused on the twin questions of imperial debt and collapse. He sought to show that the Empire was an expensive and unwieldy conglomeration kept up for the sole benefit of the English aristocracy. Ireland, the other "colonies," and "the working classes of England," should he said, "proclaim loudly that they have no interest in the vast conquests and adventurous designs of the English aristocracy." The British upper class had perfected a grand scheme whereby, at no cost to themselves, they annexed and robbed their way around the globe. Even on these "favorable" terms, however, the Empire was facing collapse under mounting debt, a disproportionate amount of which was being unfairly foisted on the Irish. "Ireland," Davis continued, could never prosper "while mortgaged for the English debt," and Irishmen should ask themselves whether they were willing "to mortgage [their] country ... in order to coerce Egypt or to demoralize China."[25]

England, Davis claimed in another article, would be defeated "*by* the Chinese war, rather than in it" as victory, though likely assured, would be enormously expensive.[26] Besides trouble in China, the Empire faced opposition in Afghanistan and Egypt. Such conflicts, according to Davis, meant that imperial costs would only continue to rise. The "union with England [would] each day drag [Ireland] into deeper debt and more hopeless misery" all for the gratification of Britain's "imperial pride and wicked

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[24] Molony, *A Soul,* 53-54.
[25] *The Morning Register,* 6 March 1841.
[26] Ibid., 4 June 1841.

ambition."[27] Finally, even the "inevitable" collapse of the Empire would see Ireland

heavily taxed in order to lessen the blow faced by the British oligarchy. In June 1841, the

Register's owner, Staunton, called a halt to Davis and Dillon's experiment citing a

decline in circulation. The paper's readership was largely made up of Davis's fellow

Protestants and they were not as receptive to the idea of Irish nationality as he had hoped

they might be. Without employment and perhaps, more importantly, without an outlet for

their ideas, the men set in motion plans to start their own newspaper.[28]

The primary medium of Young Ireland's attempt "to create and foster public

opinion in Ireland" was the *Nation*, which first appeared on 15 October 1842. In Charles

Gavan Duffy, a young journalist similar in age to them, but with considerably more

experience than they had, Davis and Dillon found the right man to get their project off the

ground. The paper was, from its inception, a sensation, and its success and popularity

only encouraged those already inclined to believe what one historian has called "the

dangerous notion ... that Irish independence could be won by public banquets and

spellbinding oratory, regularly reported in six tight columns of newspaper print."[29] Of the

small group of men at the head of the endeavor, all had some press experience and the

paper was well edited and interesting in its combination of nationalist and more general

news. Although editorial duties were initially shared, Davis quickly became the chief

contributor and editor, and for almost three years he had Ireland's largest newspaper at

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[27] Ibid., 12 March 1841.
[28] Duffy, *Memoirs*, 48, 57.
[29] R. Davis, *Young Ireland*, 76.

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his disposal.[30] In the pages of the *Nation* he would continue to explore the themes that had, since the late 1830s, been at the heart of his nationalist principles, among them a critique of imperialism.

Davis in fact soon returned to one of his favorite subjects; the "inevitable" military and financial collapse of the British Empire. In 1842 the *Nation* gleefully noted that the British were being "thrashed [in Afghanistan] by a fellow living at the back of a mountain." The reference was to the Afghan leader, Akhbar Khan, who had "been deposed or killed twenty times" but who, rather embarrassingly for the British, "always turned up the next [field report] as fresh as ever."[31] Nor were problems in Afghanistan the only threat to imperial power and prestige. The entire Eastern flank of Britain's Empire was "crumbling," and Russia was eager for an empire of her own, an empire that the *Nation* predicted, would be "built of the broken fragments of English power."[32] If, then, the British Empire somehow managed to untangle its financial problems, it would still face ruin from both internal dissent and external competition. In characterizing the Empire as on the brink of ruin, Davis hoped to undermine the argument that the imperial connection was vital to Irish prosperity. Ireland's future, he argued, was tied to the development of the nation, not the increasingly precarious Empire.

A second recurring anti-imperial theme in the *Nation* centered on a depiction of the British "civilizing mission" as a piece of hypocrisy designed to justify plunder and rapacity. There was indeed an imperial mission, the paper said, but it was an immoral

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[30] Thomas Davis, *The Poems of Thomas Davis* (New York: PJ Kennedy Publisher, 1866), preface iii. In Mitchel's introduction to this volume he described Davis as "the principal writer" of *The Nation*.
[31] *The Nation*, 15 October and 12 November 1842.

one; "from Canada to the Cape, from Ireland to Australia, from India and China to Western Africa and the distant realms of South America, no nation but has felt the teeth, and claws, and venom of this incongruous and pitiless monster." Davis, in an argument that John Mitchel would develop more fully, linked the growth of empire with the spread of materialism. Britain's ever-expanding Empire reflected, he said, the "bloody avarice of a murdering commerce."[33] The British, he charged, "warred for gain against liberty."[34] Davis sarcastically described the Afghan conflict as "truly an honorable warfare for a great moral (!), and religious (!!) nation to be engaged in." Imperialists, he concluded, were driven not by a desire to uplift, but "by some accursed lust of power, plunder, and blood shedding."[35] He accused the British of butchering the Afghans and poisoning the Chinese (by forcing the opium trade upon them), and he depicted British actions in India as "robbery unprovoked, foul and treacherous."[36] No honest observer of the Empire, he said, could see in this record any "civilizing" intent on the part of the British.

In 1841 Davis claimed that "the Irish people had no interest in" Britain's wars and did not, "thank God, share the guilt" of them.[37] Ireland, he said, was innocent of the imperial "crimes" committed in Britain's name, and it "need not fear their punishment," unless it "made common cause" with the Empire.[38] Despite statements such as these, however, Davis was aware that the Irish were well represented among the Empire's

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[32] *The Nation*, 20 July 1844.
[33] *The Nation*, 25 January 1845.
[34] Ibid., 7 January 1843.
[35] Ibid., 22 October 1842.
[36] Ibid., 8 March and 22 January 1845.
[37] *The Morning Register*, 13 March 1841.
[38] T.Davis, *Thomas Davis*, 12.

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administrators and soldiers.[39] The *Nation* lamented that "some of [Ireland's] misguided

children" had fought "under the Saxon's flag" in Afghanistan.[40] The actions of such

individuals, according to the paper, did not reflect the feelings of the majority of the Irish

people. The "people of Ireland [could never] love the Empire," Davis said, because just

as "its unholy shadow [dwarfed] the mind and spirit of every land" upon which it fell, "its

foundations were piled in the blood and property" of the Irish generations. "Empire," he

said, was a "word of reproach to its achievers, of terror to its subjects, of abhorrence to

the profound and good."[41]

In 1842 Davis led the charge against Dublin Corporation councilors who had

attempted to pass a decree indicating that body's approval and support of the war in

Afghanistan.[42] It would, he said be "one submission more" for the imperialists who

insolently cried out to the Irish "worship our crimes, for we are your masters!"[43] The

outcry against this measure and the subsequent war coverage of Irish newspapers

indicated to Davis that nationalists were united in their repudiation of Britain's imperial

forays. Indeed, he celebrated the fact that the *Nation's* consistent anti-imperial stance had

resulted in its writers being labeled traitorous "rebels" by the Unionist press.[44] If, Davis

said, the *Nation* had been "at all instrumental in inducing the leaders of the Irish People

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[39] Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire," 90-122. The majority of Irish in administrative positions in the 1840s were Protestants.
[40] *The Nation*, 3 December and 10 December 1842.
[41] *The Nation*, 9 December 1843; Molony, *A Soul*, 213.
[42] Dublin Corporation is the elected civic government of the city. Individual Corporation members (councilors) usually identified themselves as Unionist or Nationalist in sympathy.
[43] *The Nation*, 3 December and 10 December 1842.
[44] Ibid., 31 August 1844.

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to disavow ... all participation in the Eastern wars ... then we are comforted that our sorrow was not idle since it nerved us and others to be boldly just."[45]

Regardless of the positions taken in Irish editorials, there can be no question that Irish recruits were a significant part of the Empire's military force.[46] In 1830, while just 32 per cent of the United Kingdom population, the Irish composed 42 per cent of the British army. The number of Irish soldiers seeing service in India was even more striking; almost fifty per cent of recruits to the Bengal army between 1825 and 1850 had been born in Ireland.[47] Davis, as would be later nationalist writers, was a constant critic of British armed services recruiting in Ireland. The Irish in the British army were there, he said, because of the appalling economic conditions in Ireland, and not out of any sense of imperial loyalty. During the Afghan war in 1841 he had charged that "starvation and intoxication [had been] the best recruiting officers," and that they enlisted "ninety-nine recruits out of every hundred" who signed up for the British army.[48] Davis on occasion also used the Irish military contribution as a weapon to threaten the British government. He claimed at one point that two-thirds of the British army and navy consisted of Irishmen, and he warned that "if they were to be forced by the insults and injuries offered to their country, to leave ... no circumstances could prevent the utter ruin of the Empire."[49] In the absence of Irishmen, he suggested sarcastically, Britain's only other

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[45] *The Nation*, 7 January 1843.
[46] Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 510-512.
[47] Jeffrey, "Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire," in *An Irish Empire?*, 94.
[48] *The Morning Register*, 1 April 1841.
[49] Ibid., 26 March 1841.

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option would be to seek recruits among the Chartists. Davis wanted the Irishman to see that the British regarded his "loyalty" as having been cheaply won.

Nationalist writers employed several tactics in order to discourage young Irishmen from joining the forces. Regardless of what he said about starvation being behind Irish enlistment, Davis suspected that some joined the services hoping for a chance at an exotic adventure. The editor sought to disabuse Irish youth of the notion that imperial service brought with it travel to romantic lands, and opportunities for heroic escapades. Much was made of the extremely high mortality rate among soldiers, particularly those in India.[50] An article entitled "Life in India" told of the way in which the "Fever King" before laying his deadly finger upon his victim, took note of the "rosy cheek ... the swelling muscles" and the young recruit's talk of "home ... kindred ... parents, or love." Besides becoming a likely victim of war or disease, the young man would be disoriented and depressed by his unappealing and harsh environment. The Ganges, so romantic a spectacle in the imagination, was in reality, "wretchedly unpoetical ... so desolate, so unlovely, so unearthly in its aspect" that one could scarcely believe it "to be part of that world which God made, and said that it was good."[51]

A third persistent theme within Davis's anti-imperialism was his insistence on the need for solidarity with other victims of empire. John Mitchel would later say that Davis had, "from the chivalry of his character," been early drawn "to the side of all oppressed nations." He wanted his countrymen to see that they had far more in common with the

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[50] For mortality rates among British soldiers in India see Philip Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Table 1.1.

Afghan rebel and his "insurgent green" flag than they had with the British.[52] "Justice and

pity," Davis said, knew "no distinctions of clime, or race, or time."[53] He was particularly

interested in parallels between Ireland and India. The British, he said, had seized both

countries by the same means, "by a union of fraud and perjury with force."[54] He told

William Smith O'Brien that he hoped to use his journalism to constantly challenge the

British account of events in India.[55] Davis drew parallels between Ireland's history and

that of other countries under British rule. He sought to illustrate that the common enemy

was British imperialism. The following mock address appeared in the first edition of the

Nation. It purports to be from a British commander in Afghanistan to his Irish troops:

> Irishmen soldiers!! ... You are ready as ever to shed your blood for England ...
> You march to crush an audacious people who question our supremacy - deluded
> men, who refuse the blessings of our sway. You [with your past] can appreciate
> the madness of the Affghan (sic.) who against [the British] lifts his rebel flag, his
> insurgent green. By your gratitude for nigh seven hundred years since ... we
> entered Ireland, answer ye as I say - Forward for England![56]

Davis wanted to jar the Irish into realizing that they had more in common with

people as ostensibly different as the Afghans, than they did with British imperialists.

Britain he said, "wheedled" the Irish "with the notion of partnership and equality" in

order to "dragoon" her "into a meek endurance of wrong and oppression" abroad.[57]

Foreshadowing radical nationalist arguments in the early twentieth century, Davis held

that Ireland had to develop a foreign policy based explicitly on the support of all

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[51] *The Nation*, 27 July 1844.
[52] T. Davis, *The Poems*, 1.; *The Nation*, 15 October 1842.
[53] Ibid., 26 November 1842.
[54] *The Nation*, 13 May 1843.
[55] Thomas Davis to William Smith O'Brien, no date, National Library of Ireland, MS 432, no. 885.
[56] *The Nation*, 15 October 1842.

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struggling nationalities. The Irish, he said, ought to reach out to all those who like themselves "were trying by arms and agitation to get free." It was, he argued, "a bloody patricide for the Irish slave of England to smite the Afghan foe of England." The Afghan's fight was, after all, "the old cause."[58]

There is no evidence, as one historian has implied, that Thomas Davis was unconcerned with the oppression of non-European peoples.[59] The *Nation* gave an impressive amount of space to the history, culture, and politics of the Afghans, the Indians, the Maoris, and the Chinese. Davis insisted that any imperial break in Ireland would benefit other colonized peoples: "we are battling for Ireland," he said, but "if we conquer, 'twill be for mankind."[60] Nor did he limit his criticism of imperialism to just the British version. His poem *Oh! For a Steed* is explicitly anti-imperial in the broadest sense - it condemns the imperialism of the Russians in Poland and the French in North Africa, as well as the British in India and in Ireland.[61] In other articles, Davis described the emperor of Russia as an "imperial savage" and gave him the dubious honorary title, "the Mightiest of Butchers, Grand Depopulator of Poland, Gaolor of Siberia, Knouter-General of all he can catch, High Foe of Freedom."[62] He protested at a particularly gruesome massacre by the French in Algeria which he described as "a deed of such loathsome barbarity" as would stain the plume of France "for many a day."[63] While there were certainly limitations to some of Davis's arguments (the natives of New Zealand

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[57] Ibid., 25 January 1845.
[58] Quoted in Molony, *A Soul*, 53-4.
[59] Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 44, 47; R. Davis, "Thomas Davis and the Indian Empire," 81, 86.
[60] *The Nation*, 25 March 1843, quoted in R. Davis, *Young Ireland*, 209.
[61] *The Nation*, 28 September 1844.
[62] *The Nation*, 20 July and 11 May 1844.

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were portrayed as barbarians, oppressed barbarians, but barbarians nonetheless), the vast

majority of examples from this period show evidence of considered and consistent anti-

imperialism.[64] Davis was adamant that it was "not a gambling fortune made at imperial

play [that] Ireland" wanted. The Irish people, he claimed, would not sacrifice their right

to free institutions just that they might "pursue the chance of being allowed a third, or a

half even, of the offices, profligacy, and oppression of the British Empire."[65]

Davis's anti-imperialism was certainly more pronounced than that of most of his

contemporaries. That he was untypical should not, however, diminish the significance of

his engagement with imperial questions. Davis was one of the most influential and iconic

nationalist figures of the nineteenth century. Generations of subsequent nationalists

viewed him as the embodiment of Irish nationalism in its purest form. Significantly in

this regard, they did not characterize his anti-imperialism as an idiosyncrasy unrelated to

his core nationalist beliefs. Davis had definitively established the Irish Question as an

imperial one. Indeed, Charles Gavan Duffy spoke of Davis's conception of solidarity

among the colonized as having been "rendered commonplace" by "a thousand later

echoes."[66] John Mitchel, as will be seen, was responsible for giving Irish anti-

imperialism much of its content and direction. It was Davis, however, who first provided

a model of Irish nationalism in which the Irish case against British rule was made in the

context of a critique of empire. Because of the language he used and the way in which he

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[63] *The Nation*, 19 July 1845.
[64] *The Nation*, 6 April 1844.
[65] T. Davis, *Thomas Davis*, 11.
[66] Duffy, *Memoirs*, 42-43. For more on Duffy's life in Australia, see Steven R. Knowlton, "The Enigma of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy: Looking for Clues in Australia," *Éire-Ireland*, 31, no. 3-4 (1996): 189-208.

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integrated criticism of empire with his nationalism, anti-imperialism came to be

understood as an organic and natural component of the Irish nationalist argument.

II - John Mitchel, Slavery, and Imperialism

John Mitchel would take Irish anti-imperial discourse to a new level. The son of a

Presbyterian minister from Newry, County Down, he graduated from Trinity College,

Dublin in 1834 and qualified as a solicitor in 1840. Unlike his friend Davis, Mitchel did

actually practice law for a number of years, although he too would abandon the legal

profession for journalism. Over the course of thirty years Mitchel was the editor of more

than half a dozen newspapers (four of which he established himself) and the author of

several books, the most influential of which was undoubtedly his *Jail Journal* (1854). A

man of considerable intellect and energy, he spent his life publicly seething at the British

Empire, which he blamed for Ireland's and, consequently, his own misfortune.

Mitchel is typically remembered as the most implacable, bitter, and violent (in

rhetoric at least) of mid-nineteenth-century Irish nationalists. Several factors have

contributed to this image of him. First, virtually every subsequent "radical" nationalist

leader has claimed Mitchel as a source of revolutionary inspiration. Although he did not

actually participate in any rebellion, his revolutionary status has been firmly established

by indirect association.[67] Second, Mitchel's depiction of the Irish Famine as "genocide"

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[67] Patrick Maume, "Young Ireland, Arthur Griffith, and Republican Ideology: The Question of Continuity," *Éire Ireland*, 34, no. 2 (1999): 165. And G. Kearns, "Educate that holy hatred: Place, Trauma and Identity in the Irish Nationalism of John Mitchel," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 891;

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remained, long after his death, fundamental to the popular nationalist conception of that

event. This, more than anything else, has kept his name a central feature of popular

nationalist histories of the nineteenth century. Finally, Mitchel's outspoken support of

American chattel slavery made him infamous to many of his contemporaries and

something of a pariah to historians. Indeed, there is a noticeable discrepancy between his

centrality to popular nationalist memory and the relatively narrow place given him by

modern scholars. Although Mitchel has recently been brought back into the debate,

much of this work has been in the form of literary, rather than historical, analysis.[68]

There has been a tendency to dismiss Mitchel as a rancorous bigot whose regrettable

excesses are unworthy of serious historical scrutiny.[69] Behind the rhetoric, however, was

a life with the potential to reveal many insights into nineteenth and indeed, twentieth-

century Irish nationalism.

Thomas Davis was one of Mitchel's earliest and most powerful influences.

Mitchel deeply admired his colleague and considered him to be the embodiment of

unselfish and pure nationalism. Upon the death of Davis in 1845, Mitchel became editor

of the *Nation,* where his first task was to finish writing articles begun by his recently

deceased friend. He was so anxious to succeed at this task that he asked another friend to

check the articles in question to see if it was apparent where Davis's portion ended and

Comerford, *The Fenians*, 37.

[68] Sean Ryder, "Male Autobiography and Irish Cultural Nationalism: John Mitchel and James Clarence Mangan," *The Irish Review* No. 13 (Winter 1992-1993), 70-77; Christopher Morash, "The Rhetoric of Right in Mitchel's *Jail Journal,*" in *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History,* ed. Joep Leerssen, A.H. van der Weel and Bart Westerwee (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 207-218.

[69] Malcom Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature, From Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 142; Tadhg Foley, "Praties, Professors, and Political Economy," *Irish*

his own began.[70] Many of his early articles then, continued to develop the anti-imperial

themes that had been so important to Davis. One lead editorial entitled "The Enemy in

India" spoke of the Empire "executing in another hemisphere its sanguinary mission of

civilization by the usual methods of plunder and slaughter."[71] Ireland, another editorial

went, was "now an India ... [with Irishmen] a caste, a class of people of the felon

Empire."[72] Indeed, more than a decade after Davis's death, Mitchel was still giving

public lectures on the "English in India."[73] Other articles deplored the number of

Irishmen in imperial service, and the number of "brave men" and "gallant soldiers" who

had died as a result of "being found in bad company."[74] Mitchel warned that Ireland,

while part of the British Empire, was "chargeable with the guilt of these national

crimes."[75] Nor were the British Mitchel's only target: a November 1846 editorial

denounced the "conspiracy of European imperialism" which kept the members of the

Entente Cordiale silent, as another nationality, the Poles, was "sacrificed" on the altar of

Empire.[76]

Many of Mitchel's anti-imperial arguments and, in particular, his early themes,

clearly suggest a significant intellectual debt to Davis. Mitchel's critique of empire,

however, was to become much more ideologically complex than that of his friend. This

is partly because Davis did not live to see the full scope of the Famine, an event that

Reporter No. 19 (Third Quarter 1995), 6-7,

[70] P.A. Sillard, *The Life and Letters of John Martin with Sketches of Thomas Devin Reilly, Father John Kenyon and other Young Irelanders*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1901), 29.

[71] *The Nation*, 14 February 1846.

[72] Ibid., 7 November 1846.

[73] *The Southern Citizen*, 4 February 1858.

[74] *The Nation*, 28 February 1846.

[75] *The Nation*, 26 December 1846.

became Mitchel's key exhibit in his case against imperialism.[77] More critically, however, it is because Mitchel's anti-imperialism was sharpened and hardened in the context of a great ideological struggle taking place not in Ireland, but in the United States.

His increasingly radical and violent rhetoric began to alarm more conservative elements at the *Nation,* and toward the end of 1847 Mitchel left in order to set up his own newspaper. The *United Irishman* was openly seditious and within weeks, its editor was arrested and convicted of "treason-felony" against the Empire. Mitchel was transported to the Van Diemen's Land penal colony in 1848.[78] After a sensational escape in 1854, he and his young family settled in New York City. Within months of his arrival, Mitchel was to become deeply immersed in the battle over African-American slavery. American acquaintances were somewhat bemused by Mitchel's vigorous and urgent defense of a system about which he ostensibly knew little.[79] His friends were scandalized that someone they considered a humane and enlightened individual could defend and even actively promote the benefits of the slave system. Some of his former colleagues clearly felt that his pro-slavery work was inconsistent with and detracted from his Irish nationalism.[80]

Mitchel repeatedly denied that this was the case and, in fact, went so far as to claim that the very opposite was true. He argued that his pro-slavery position was

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[76] *The Nation,* 28 November 1846.
[77] T.W. Moody has argued that there is "no reason to think that, if Davis had lived to witness the agony of the great famine ... he would have flinched from the challenge that drove Mitchel" in a more radical direction. T.W. Moody, "Thomas Davis and the Irish Nation," *Hermathena,* 103 (1966), 18.
[78] His fellow Young Irelanders did not fare much better. Their abortive insurrection (29 July 1848) was easily crushed and the leaders arrested or sent into hiding.
[79] Deegee Lester, "John Mitchel's Wilderness Years in Tennessee," *Éire Ireland,* 25, no. 2 (1990): 10.
[80] Most notably, Charles Gavan Duffy.

entirely complementary to his stand against imperialism. The common enemy, Mitchel said, was something called "the British System."[81] That term referred to the practices, values, and assumptions of nineteenth-century liberalism. Liberal imperialism, he argued, stripped of its pretensions to civilize and uplift, was just as destructive and violent as any other kind of imperialism. It conquered by free trade and free labor, by treaty and by civilizing initiative until, one day, the whole facade collapsed and the conquered country awoke to the same harsh reality as had Ireland in the 1840s; that is to a shattered economy, social chaos, and famine. Mitchel considered Britain's occupation of Ireland and the Northern state's insistence on implementing free labor as twin manifestations of the same ideology. Though his support of slavery was unquestionably informed by racial prejudice, Mitchel's underlying argument was thus driven by much broader social and economic questions. In order to fully understand his objections to empire then, it is useful to put in context his defense of the American South.

Mitchel's escape from Van Diemen's Land and his arrival to America in 1854 caused a sensation. Lavish banquets were held in his honor, and for three weeks he was the toast of New York. Initially, he took this fulsome American welcome as evidence that the United States was already primed to reject closer relations with Britain and even, perhaps, take concrete steps toward the liberation of Ireland. When a friend pointed out to him that, "his entertainers did not in truth intend any special insult to the British Government," and that, "these demonstrations were intended merely as passing tributes,"

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[81] John Mitchel to Fr. Kenyon, November 1857. Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 104.

Mitchel "ceased to take much interest in them."[82] Quite early on, in fact, he announced

that he had no intention of joining the activities of the various Irish-American

organizations then clamoring for his sponsorship. In a letter to his sister Mary, Mitchel

explained that he would have "none of their factions ... [and] nothing to do with

Conventions, with Emmett Monuments, Emigrant Aid Associations, or the rest." He now

believed that only a military invasion could wrest Ireland from the grip of the British

Empire, and he therefore dismissed all speechifying nationalism as irrelevant. Mitchel

vowed not to lend his name to any organized Irish movement in America, feeling, he

said, that his "infidelity, and still more [his] sneering disposition [would] do more harm

than good."[83]

The "infidelity" Mitchel referred to was his increasingly prominent role as a

defender of slavery. He began his first American newspaper, the *Citizen*, only a few

weeks after arriving in New York and, in its pages the reader was as likely to find an

attack on the abolitionist movement as they were to read about the evils of the "British

System." Not surprisingly, Mitchel frequently clashed with the abolitionists. One of his

most outspoken critics was the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher who, noting Mitchel's

defense of Irish freedom and his support of American slavery, publicly accused him of

hypocrisy. Mitchel responded that neither Washington nor Jefferson had perceived a

conflict between the fight for national freedom and the holding of slaves, and that, as

such, he himself was happy to be considered in such worthy company. Mitchel knew that

his defense of slavery would be an "ungracious task," for, "on [his] side in [the]

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[82] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 39.

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controversy everything [sounded] harsh and [looked] repulsive."[84] The Reverend

Beecher on the other hand had "chosen, if not the better, at least the balmier part" of the

debate. Beecher's position was quite safe, Mitchel said, because "all the prevailing

cants" were in his favor. He was free to proffer "kind-looking" sentiments of the sort that

had become so pleasing to "the enlightened modern heart." Mitchel himself, on the other

hand, was forced to appeal to the example "of mere ancients ... of persons behind the

century" (i.e. Thomas Jefferson). He declared that "slaveholding [was] not a crime" and

that it had never occurred to society to consider it such until the arrival of the enlightened

and liberal nineteenth century.[85]

This exchange with Beecher was a significant consideration in Mitchel's

subsequent decision to leave New York and move to the South.[86] He ran the *Citizen* for

just one year, after which the "disgusts, discontents, and irritations" of operating in such a

hostile environment "compelled" him to break his association with the paper.[87] Mitchel's

family moved to a log cabin in a remote area of Tennessee in 1855, from where he wrote

to a friend, "perhaps you may hear of me again in the very thick of affairs - and perhaps

not." He claimed to have grown tired of life in the city and, on a more philosophical

level, to have "contracted (owing to an exaggerative habit) a diseased and monomaniacal

hatred of 'progress.'"[88] He intended to live as a farmer and to leave behind journalism,

the lecture circuit, and the "ranting and mouthing portion" of Irish-American

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[83] John Mitchel to his sister Mary, 1 November 1855, cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 78.
[84] Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 48.
[85] Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 48.
[86] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 46.
[87] Mitchel had also clashed repeatedly with the Catholic hierarchy in New York. Archbishop John Hughes was hostile to Mitchel because of the Young Ireland's association with the European tumults of 1848.

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nationalists.[89] The pioneer life, however, held limited appeal for Mitchel's wife Jennie, on whose account he eventually moved the family to a house on the outskirts of Knoxville.

Indeed, Mitchel's move to the rural South only convinced him further that the North had gotten things very wrong. He was clearly impressed with every level of Southern society. He perceived the South to be (happily) behind the times, and he viewed the region as a kind of agricultural utopia where commercialism and industrialism had not taken hold.[90] Southerners were not fooled by the false promises of "progress" and their strict social hierarchy produced a prosperous, happy, and stable society. Slavery, Mitchel argued, was an essential contributor to this stability. After the move to Knoxville, he and his family frequently socialized amongst the Southern elite, a group whose gentility and refinement he contrasted with the brash and rude Northerners.[91] Even Mitchel's rustic mountain neighbors came in for praise. Although he considered them woefully ignorant, he observed that they nonetheless "[called] nobody master" and had a "bold and independent bearing."[92] Mitchel's correspondence from this time shows that he was increasingly inclined to see the United States as two essentially distinct societies. Late in 1857 he wrote to a friend that he "preferred the South in every sense,"

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[88] John Mitchel to Ms. Thompson, 1 Nov. 1855, NLI, MS 329.

[89] John Mitchel to Mrs. Williams, 24 July 1855, NLI, MS 3226 (Hickey Collection).

[90] Malcom Brown has pointed to Mitchel's apparent inability to see the inherently commercial nature of the plantation economy. "For a man whose lifelong pride was his ability to smell out cant," he says, "this myth of a nation of anti-commerical slaveowners" should have been immediately evident. Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature*, 142.

[91] For more on Mitchel's admiration of Southern society's value system and his equation of Northern society with that of the British, see David T. Gleeson, "Parallel Struggles: Irish Republicanism in the American South, 1798-1876," *Éire-Ireland*, 34, no. 2 (1999): 108-09. See also, Bryan McGovern, "John Mitchel: Ecumenical Nationalist in the Old South," *New Hibernia Review*, 5, no. 2 (2001): 99-110.

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believing its society "to be more sound, more just" than that of the North.[93] In November

of that year he wrote to another correspondent that he had "perceived in the institutions,

and ... in the tendencies, proclivities, [and] aspirations ... of the southern states, a special

hostility to the British system ... hostility founded on *essential differences in the two*

types of human society."[94]

To understand what Mitchel meant by "two types of human society," we must

view his defense of the South in the context of contemporary pro-slavery ideology. His

thinking on the issue strongly paralleled that of men like George Fitzhugh and John C.

Calhoun, two outspoken pro-slavery polemicists who argued that the agricultural slave

economy of the South produced a completely different, and superior society than that of

the capitalistic free labor economy of the North. In essence, they argued that slavery was

a far more benign institution than that of free labor. In his books *Sociology for the South*

(1854) and *Cannibals All* (1857), Fitzhugh made the argument that, in the South, slaves

were possessions of the master in much the same familial sense that his wife and children

were his possessions.[95] Emancipation was out of the question for, if a white worker could

barely survive the competitive workplace, it would be impossible for a "child-like

African" to cope with its dangers. Slaves, he argued, were generally well fed and

clothed, and they received the master's protection in sickness and in old age. Moreover,

the plantation owner had a responsibility for and an interest in his worker's well being in

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[92] John Mitchel to Mrs. Williams, 24 July 1855, NLI, MS 3226 (Hickey Collection).
[93] John Mitchel to Ms. Thompson, late 1858, cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 107.
[94] John Mitchel to Fr. Kenyon, November 1857 (my emphasis). Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 105.
[95] Simon Wendt, "Southern Intellectuals and the Defense of Slavery: The Proslavery Thought of George Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes," *Southern Historian*, 23 (2002), 59.

a way that was not true of any Lowell factory owner. Northern laborers, according to this view, were constantly threatened with economic and moral ruin. Their lives were made precarious by variable wages, market fluctuations, poor housing, and general degradation.[96]

Pro-slavery polemicists furthermore argued that free society led to class conflict, and thus, to social anarchy. They believed that economic and social individualism destroyed organic human society at the expense of the weakest individuals and for the benefit of the wealthiest. The rigid social order of the slave society, in contrast, reflected organic human relations (the family, for example), and was thus much more stable, happy, and just. Fitzhugh argued that the only way to protect the vulnerable in society was to implement a strict social hierarchy. Indeed, he went so far as to argue that "the duty of protecting the weak involves the necessity of enslaving them."[97] All labor, in other words, ought to be slave labor, because true freedom was protection from the kind of arbitrary forces which threatened those dependent on a wage. Fitzhugh's approach, as one historian has noted, was as much a misguided attempt to defend human slavery as it was "an endeavor to portray the possibilities of an alternative society in which capitalist competition and individualism would largely disappear."[98]

Mitchel clearly identified both with Fitzhugh's assessment of slavery's benefits and his critique of political economy. Much of the content of pro-slavery ideology,

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[96] Ibid., 57-61.

[97] Ibid., 59.

[98] Robert A. Garson, "Proslavery as Political Theory: The Examples of John C. Calhoun and George Fitzhugh," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 84, no. 2 (1985), 199. Much of the work in this field is based on that of Eugene Genovese. See Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

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however, was not entirely new to Mitchel. Throughout his adult life he was a committed follower of the Scottish philosopher and polemicist, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881).[99] A compelling writer whose hyperbolic style appealed to many of the Younger Irelanders, Carlyle was intensely conservative in that he rejected many of the ascendant currents of nineteenth-century liberalism. He favored strong paternalistic leadership and authority over mass politics and democracy; the artisan over the factory; the spiritual over the material; and the wholesome rural life over that of the socially confused city. His insistence on there being a natural order of all things and all beings translated into an entrenched and pervasive racism, and he believed that neither blacks nor Jews could be "emancipated from the laws of nature."[100]

Charles Gavan Duffy blamed Mitchel's racism on his fascination with Carlyle. Mitchel, however, clearly did not consider the Scotsman "sound" on the question of empire: "Carlyle cannot write rationally about Ireland; and he believes that Carthage has a mission to conquer the world."[101] In fact, with the exception perhaps of his writing style, Mitchel's most pronounced Carlylean characteristic was the belief, central to nineteenth-century conservatism, that the strong in society had a duty and a responsibility to protect the weak. The weak, in turn, had a duty to obey the strong. As a nationalist, Mitchel believed that the "strong" in Irish society should be Irishmen, that is, that the indigenous elite had the first claim upon the loyalty of their nation's citizens. Upon his arrival in America, it is clear that Mitchel interpreted Carlyle's insistence upon the right

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[99] Christopher Morash, "The Rhetoric of Right in Mitchel's *Jail Journal*," 207-218.
[100] Charles Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle* (New York: Scribner, 1892), 117.
[101] John Mitchel, *Jail Journal 1876, or, Five Years in British Prisons* (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1996),

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of the "foolish man to be guided by the wise man," to mean that the white man had a right

"to force the negro to be useful and happy."[102]

In October 1857 the erstwhile frontiersman returned once again to journalism

with the publication of the weekly *Southern Citizen* (Knoxville). Mitchel's new paper

was intended to convince Southerners that their society was "the best" and the

"wholesomest" in the world, and that the chief reason for its distinction and superiority

was the system of slavery. In Mitchel's mind, that institution was critical to the South for

it anchored the entire social order. He told a friend that even had the British not been on

the side of abolition, he would still have "zealously maintained the cause of slavery" and

tried "to make the people [in the South] proud and fond of it as a national institution."[103]

Slavery, he said, was the "best state of existence for the negro" and "the taking of negroes

out of their brutal slavery in Africa and promoting them to a humane and reasonable

slavery [was] good."[104]

Many of Mitchel's closest acquaintances were understandably appalled at this

kind of sentiment. Echoing Reverend Beecher, one friend wrote that she found it "hard to

reconcile" his challenge to imperial tyranny in *Jail Journal* with his later position on

slavery. In responding to her, Mitchel questioned why society had suddenly decided that

the keeping of slaves was inconsistent with the demand for national self-determination.

He denied any paradox in his principles and responded: "does it not occur to you to

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191. Originally published: Glasgow: Cameron & Ferguson, 1876.
[102] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 111.
[103] John Mitchel to Fr. Kenyon, November 1857. Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 105.
[104] John Mitchel to Ms. Thompson, 24 April 1854, NLI, MS 329; John Mitchel to Ms. Thompson, late 1858, cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 107.

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inquire whether in other ages, and even so late as the age of our fathers, those two sets of

sentiments, now called irreconcilable, were not in fact constantly reconciled, and whether

people so much as suspected that there was any discrepancy to reconcile. My dear lady,

beware of the Nineteenth Century."[105] He declared abolition to be a mere fad and he

joked that his Irish friends "might as well whistle jigs to a milestone" as attempt to

change his mind on the subject.[106] Mitchel accepted that many of his former colleagues

would not (dare to, in his opinion) subscribe to his position on slavery, and he asked only

that they "believe and admit that [he] would not serve any cause which [he did] not at last

believe to be just and good." He was aware, he said, that "a great many people [regarded

him] as an incendiary and a madman," but that was not going to stop his efforts to save

"the South from her enemies and oppressors," even if that required the "break up of the

[American] Union."[107]

Despite his confident rebuttal, however, Mitchel clearly took very seriously the

imputation that he had abandoned the ideals of anti-imperialism and the cause of Ireland.

In a remarkably frank and personal letter to Fr. Kenyon, his close friend and fellow

nationalist, Mitchel denied that he had changed, and insisted that he was "actuated by the

very same sort of motives, and ... moved by the same impulses, passions, and affections,

as ever." His pro-slavery stance, he said, did not reflect any change in personal values,

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[105] John Mitchel to Ms. Thomson, 24 April 1854, NLI, MS 329. Mitchel went on to serve in the
Confederate ambulance corps during the Civil War. Three of his sons fought for the South. The eldest
(John Jr.) was killed at Fort Sumter, while his youngest son (William) died at Gettysburg. Mitchel's
middle son James survived the war, although he lost an arm in battle. His son, John Purroy Mitchel,
became Mayor of New York City. For more on the Mitchel family see Rebecca O'Connor,
Jenny Mitchel, Young Irelander: a Biography (Dublin: O'Conner Trust, 1988).
[106] John Mitchel to Mrs. Williams, 16 February 1858, NLI, MS 3226 (Hickey Collection).
[107] John Mitchel to Mrs. Williams, 1 May 1859, NLI MS 3226 (Hickey Collection).

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for he still despised "injustice and oppression, and [still held] the same notions of right and wrong." Mitchel argued that his position had not changed because his enemy had not changed. That enemy was liberalism, or as he called it, "the British system." He had, he said, "cherished and cultivated" a deep hatred of that system "at home and abroad, as it [worked] in England itself, in India, on the continent of Europe, and in Ireland." Liberalism had "money in its purse, and a code of opinion received to a really wonderful extent by all mankind, that is by the richest ... the strongest part of mankind." His own actions from 1845 to 1857 seemed to Mitchel, "to be consistent, to be of one piece." He had, he said, "contended with the enemy of mankind constantly ... on the same argument, varying it only with varying circumstances." In Ireland, he had sought to "dismember the Empire" in the hopes that its collapse would halt the march of liberal ideology. Now, he said, the enemy was "everywhere, and nowhere more active and mischievous than in [the] United States."[108]

Mitchel was convinced that the North's willingness to adopt British values and institutions reflected the creeping spread of a destructive and dangerous ideology. He defended slavery because he saw the issue as a critical stand against the same forces that underpinned imperialism. What troubled Mitchel was that Irish peasants did not seem to make this connection. They did not grasp that the same system which kept them underfoot in Ireland would continue to keep them down in New York City, in Chicago, or in Boston. That the freedoms promised by liberalism were ultimately destructive,

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[108] John Mitchel to Fr. Kenyon, November 1857. Cited in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 104-106.

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Mitchel believed, was demonstrated by the fact that, unlike the Irish peasant, the

plantation slave knew where his next meal would come from.[109]

Mitchel's position was that if his friends could not understand his defense of

slavery, then they had misunderstood his defense of Ireland. His target in both cases was

an ideology, a social and economic philosophy, the application of which he believed to

have caused misery and depravation in both Ireland and America. The ruthless and

callous application of political economy, had in Mitchel's mind, led to the annihilation of

over one million Irish peasants in the Famine. If liberals were to be believed, those

peasants had been emancipated, insomuch as they fell into the category of "free labor."

In practice, he said however, this "freedom" meant only that they were free to starve.

Disqualified from land ownership, dependent on market forces, and without the

protection of a paternalistic gentry, Irish peasants were destined to be left behind in such

"progressive" times. The soup kitchens, the public works schemes, and all such

philanthropic initiatives were, Mitchel argued, merely diversions. They were flimsy

temporary measures designed to hide the fact that the people had been abandoned by

those claiming their allegiance. Modern British imperialism was rotten, not so much

because it stifled Irish nationality, but because it used the language of paternalism while

stripping away that very thing. No talk of civilizing missions or of benign philanthropy

could mask the fact that British "protection" had resulted in the utter destruction of Irish

society, to such an extent in fact, that "Irish" became a synonym for wild, uncivilized,

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[109] This was not a new argument. A decade earlier, one Irish correspondent to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* referred to the "comparatively happy state of the negroes in America." He argued that, "thousands of *nominally* freemen in England and misgoverned Ireland would gladly exchange places with

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and chaotic. Mitchel pointed to Ireland as evidence that free labor and philanthropic civilizing missions were imperial weapons. Liberals had carried out a great fraud in Ireland and were now attempting to do the same in America. The North's aggressive insistence on free labor seemed to Mitchel, evidence that the region had adopted both the liberal attitudes and the imperial arrogance of Britain.

If anything then, Mitchel's hatred of empire was hardened as a result of his experience in the slavery debate. He dismissed abolition as false philanthropy designed to promote free labor and the values of political economy, and his indictment of empire would be based on similar objections. Imperialism was nothing more, he said, than that same political economy and false paternalism on an international scale. Indeed, Mitchel's rejection of empire can be divided into two broad themes, which he visited again and again in his journalism. First, he rejected empire based on the belief that it was little more than a vehicle for political economy, a shabby commercial ploy. Second, Mitchel denounced as a sham the notion of philanthropy, either individual or imperial. The remainder of the chapter will demonstrate how Mitchel's anti-imperialism developed along these twin themes.

Mitchel's indictment of modern imperialism was closely tied to his condemnation of many aspects of nineteenth-century life.[110] He lamented in particular the rise of commercialism and materialism, forces he believed to be at the heart of all imperialist endeavors. Arguing that the nineteenth century world was ruled by the "obscenest of the

them." *Liberator*, 24 June 1842 (emphasis in original).
[110] James Quinn has written an important and insightful essay on Mitchel's hatred of nineteenth-century liberalism. James Quinn, "John Mitchel and the Rejection of the Nineteenth Century," *Éire Ireland*, 38 no.

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earth-spirits" once known as Mammon, but now called Commerce, Mitchel accused

British imperialists of being motivated by nothing higher than greed. The Anglo-Saxon

"[worshipped] only money, [prayed] to no other god than money, would buy and sell the

Holy Ghost for money and [believed] that the world was created, sustained and governed

... by the only one true, immutable, Almighty Pound Sterling."[111] Nineteenth-century

materialism, he argued fueled the imperialism of the European powers. In this light, the

greatest of modern Empires, that of the British, was little more than a "monstrous

commercial firm ... bankrupt ... trading on false credit" and embezzling its way around

the globe.[112] Over ten years and through three newspapers, Mitchel constantly preached

that commerce was "the spirit which [actuated] English domination all over the world,"

allowing cunning imperialists with just "one commercial foot in the door" to begin the

process of annexation "by account books."[113] No nation was safe from this creeping

imperial commercialism and Mitchel warned Americans that their "Anglo-Saxon

brethren" would have no qualms about undermining the United States in the way they

had India.[114]

Mitchel singled India out for special mention. One of his favorite targets was

"world-clothing Manchester," which had, he said, utterly destroyed India's cotton

manufacturing industry and then forced the world to buy its own inferior products. He

claimed that the "policy of British traffic in the East [had] always been to make low-

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3-4 (2003): 90-108.

[111] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 252, 89.

[112] John Mitchel, *The Crusade of the Period and Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (New York: Lynch, Cole and Meehan, 1873), 324-325.

[113] *The United Irishman*, 8 April 1848; *The Citizen*, 28 January 1854; *The Southern Citizen*, 4 February 1858.

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priced counterfeits of all native manufactures - at first, of good serviceable quality, until the genuine maker was thrust out of the market, then gradually 'pouring in' worse and worse Manchester rubbish."[115] Imperial wars, Mitchel said, were invariably undertaken with the express purpose of "procuring monopolies for English tradesmen and merchants" and in particular, of securing "new customers for Manchester."[116] As they had in India, the imperialists had gone to "diffuse over China the blessings of British 'Christianity', which turned out, when the bales were opened, to be nothing but printed cottons."[117] Using dubious humanitarian missions to disguise their commercial designs, the British tried to woo young Irishmen into military service. Mitchel urged his countrymen not to join Britain's army, for if they did, they would be fighting, not for liberty, but in the "cause of tyrants and robbers and cotton manufacturers."[118]

Lest Irishmen might be tempted by the Empire's commercial opportunities, Mitchel spent a great deal of time stressing that the true imperial beneficiaries were the "moneyocracy" and "shopocracy" of Britain.[119] Ordinary Britons received no benefit for their support, in blood and taxes, of liberalism's international crusade against labor and nationality. In a long critique of what it called "Crystal-Palacedom" Mitchel's *Citizen* charged that the Great Exhibition of 1851 had been conceived as a grotesque monument to imperial greed and commercialism:

[114] *The Irish Citizen*, 30 May 1868.
[115] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 304, 109.
[116] Ibid., 304; *The Nation*, 22 May 1847 and 26 December 1846.
[117] *The United Irishman*, 20 May 1848.
[118] *The Citizen*, 25 March 1854.
[119] Ibid., 11 November 1854.

The magnificence of damasks and embroidery and the splendor of plate and vases, and jewelry represented the wealth of the money changers and merchant princes who wax fat upon the spoils of India and other British possessions ... they represented cotton spinners, the silk mercers and all the factory owners and capitalists who grow rich at the expense of the half paid artizan [sic] whose labor and skills produce these articles.[120]

Mitchel here is making a direct link between the capitalist and the imperialist, and he finishes by making a call for solidarity between the laborer and the colonized. The common enemy was cosmopolitan capitalism, which was, in this reading, both anti-national and anti-labor. Later in 1854 he employed a similar argument in an editorial on the increase in the number of rail and boat accidents in the United States. Mitchel compared the steam tycoons of America with the factory owners of England, insomuch as both sought to maximize their profits "no matter what [the] human sacrifice." The common man, whether Irish, English, or American, was a victim to "the spirit of Mammon, the cupidity of capitalists and merchants and commercial corporations." The steam tycoons were the "fungi of the republic [and their] aim [was] to ape the railway kings and cotton lords of Liverpool and Manchester." Perhaps most ominously of all, they had, in their "tendency to anglicize American institutions," revealed themselves as eager students of "the British System."[121]

Cosmopolitan capitalism was driven by political economy, which Mitchel claimed had become "a favorite study, or rather, indeed, the creed and gospel of England" to such an extent, that even children learned by heart "its savage doctrine."[122] He cited as a

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[120] Ibid., 28 January 1854.
[121] Ibid., 11 November 1854.
[122] Mitchel, *Last Conquest*, 201-02.

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typical disciple of the new religion one James Haughton, a Dublin Quaker and abolitionist who was also an advocate of Repeal. Probably the most persistent of all Irish abolitionists, Haughton penned thousands of earnest anti-slavery letters to virtually every newspaper in Ireland, as well as to many in Britain and America. Regarded by most nationalists as a sort of affable eccentric, he consistently railed against human rights abuses wherever and to whomever they occurred. Haughton sought to convince Irish leaders that abolition and nationalism were sister struggles, and that no true nationalist would ever support slavery. He was, to Mitchel, a kind of anti-Carlyle, a typical liberal who was soft on all the "wrong" issues; "he joined all benevolent enterprises; interested himself for plundered Indian Rajahs - made temperance speeches - was against flogging the army, capital punishments and in general everything that was strong, harsh, or unpleasant."[123] Consistent with his liberal ideals, Haughton was also apparently "a deep political economist." Mitchel told his readers that "this enlightened emancipator of the human race" was so "determined to carry out the great gospel of political economy" that he had hoarded grain during the Famine, with an eye toward selling it on when prices rose.[124] Whether true or a product of his imagination, Mitchel's claim nonetheless serves as an illustration of his impatience with liberalism, an ideology he believed full of contradiction and hypocrisy. Liberals were kind-hearted supporters of every cause, with the exception, as far as Mitchel was concerned, of those whose remedy might interfere with profits. He, perhaps unfairly, singled out Haughton as typical of wealthy Irishmen who were so moved by the plight of people thousands of miles away and yet so

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[123] Ibid., 172.

apparently indifferent to the suffering of those in their midst.[125] Of Haughton, he sarcastically said, "we cannot blame him ... his feelings were too much absorbed by the suffering of Africans [and] the Rajah of Sattara, whose unmerited wrongs touched his very soul."[126]

Mitchel's attack on James Haughton also serves to highlight his belief that abolitionists were motivated more by political economy and free labor ideology than they were by any genuine commitment to human rights. Indeed, a second important theme within Mitchel's writing was that all cosmopolitan philanthropy (abolitionism, for example) was pure cant, driven not by benign humanitarianism, but by the liberal agenda. He argued, in fact, that such philanthropy was a kind of cultural imperialism, and that it was no more genuine than any of the other Anglo-Saxon "civilizing missions." Davis too had dismissed the notion of there being any civilizing intent on the part of imperialists, but Mitchel's rejection of those claims was at once more broad and more pronounced.

Philanthropy was a thoroughly modern phenomenon that epitomized for Mitchel the arrogance and hypocrisy of his age. His intolerance for what he considered philanthropic cant was evident in the pages of the *Citizen*. The paper's mission, he declared in its first issue, was to unmask the nineteenth century by stripping "off [its] sanctimonious pretence to liberalism."[127] Anyone who claimed to have an "improving" or "modern" or "civilizing" agenda was first ridiculed, then condemned. Mitchel had, he claimed, spent his first three weeks in New York being "puffed up" by "womanists,

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[124] *The Citizen*, 14 January 1854.
[125] Ironically, the Quakers as a group were the least indifferent to Irish suffering during the Famine.
[126] *The Citizen*, 14 January 1854.

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socialists, vegetarians [and] evangelists" who, as soon as he expressed his opinions, turned quite viciously against him.[128] Every cause, it seemed to him, was looking for the ultimate modern spokesman; a mouthpiece who would unthinkingly champion whatever issue was judged "liberal" or, rather, fashionable in the year 1854. Each celebrity newcomer was courted and evaluated to determine their usefulness.

The common denominator among these groups, according to Mitchel, was their tendency to promote the interests of the individual over those of the society. In this, they were typical of liberalism, an ideology, Mitchel argued, which, whether through free labor or through women's suffrage, ultimately produced a fragmented and divided society. A philanthropist was anyone arrogant enough to claim "by new inventions and comfortable contrivances" to have found a solution to all human suffering. In the nineteenth century, "the grandest effort of godlike genius [was] to augment human power - power over the elements, power over uncivilized men, - and all for our own comfort." So conceited was "this foul Spirit of the Age," that "by tremendous enginery [sic] of steam, and electricity, and gunpowder - by capital and the 'law of progress,' and the superhuman power of co-operation," that it almost promised to "scale the heavens."[129] Philanthropists were those who claimed that all of life's discomforts and unpleasantness were, in the new age, unnecessary.

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[127] *The Citizen,* 7 January 1854.
[128] *The Citizen,* 18 February 1854.
[129] Mitchel, *Jail Journal,* 44.

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It was this notion of nineteenth-century exceptionalism and supposed humanity, that Mitchel most took issue with.[130] The nineteenth century, as far as he was concerned, was an age of depraved imperialism at the expense of nationality, and an era of predatory capitalism at the expense of the artisan and the peasant. The oppressed then suffered the further insult of being told that the upheaval in their lives was all for their own good, or at least, that it had all been done in the interest of civilization and progress. Euphemisms were the order of the day, and "imperialists" became "philanthropists," for "in the nineteenth century, you know, one would not think of invading and laying waste any country, except for its own good - to develop its resources as it were."[131] British imperialism, moreover, had "no zeal for civilization or for Christianity as [was] sanctimoniously pretended," but was instead driven by the "unblessed thirst of gold and godless lust of blood stained dominion." Mitchel accused all imperial powers, not just the British, of usurpation under "false and villainous pretexts." Full of arrogant claims about "civilizing missions," imperial discourse had sunk to a level where the "very distinctions of right and wrong [were] veiled by a canting phraseology."[132]

The conspiracy between capitalist and imperialist meant, furthermore, that the world was going to receive the blessings of Anglo-Saxon social and economic values whether it liked it or not. Commenting on the relative freedom of the natives in French Tahiti, Mitchel mockingly observed that "if the English or Americans were here in [place of the French], the poor brown fellows would surely be compelled to labour, to read

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[130] A race, incidentally, to which he, not in any celebratory sense, considered himself to belong.
[131] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 104.
[132] *The Nation*, 24 February and 3 January 1846.

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English, to say their catechism, and raise produce for their masters; or their brown backs would be made acquainted with the civilizing cat-o'-nine-tails."[133] Indeed, he took particular pleasure in disabusing his readers of the notion that Christian morality played even the smallest role in imperial motivations. The imperialists were constantly on the look-out for some kind of pretext to seize territory, and it was thus no coincidence that they were "always disgusted at immorality in those whom they [were about] to subjugate." Morality, he said, was a "great feature in [Anglo-Saxon] conquest."[134] In 1858, when an Anglo-American treaty (giving Britain access to portions of Latin America) seemed to be in the offing, Mitchel's *Southern Citizen* warned its readers not to be fooled by talk of benign "protectorships." The "fruits" of British "protection," it noted sarcastically, were evident "over the whole world," where it was revealed to be the "forerunner of subjugation, annihilation, or annexation."[135] No shallow concept of philanthropy, the paper declared, gave one country the right to impinge upon the sovereignty of another.[136]

Mitchel's vigorous defense of slavery, and his rejection of the concept of philanthropy led to charges that Irish nationalism was selfishly insular. He responded that, "surely nine millions of Irishmen [were] sufficient for the exercise of any man's philanthropy - surely to raise Ireland [was] labour" enough given the challenges that country faced. Echoing the words of Davis, he added, "Men of Ireland! Remember ye have a country. She is enough for present. First make her a Nation." To Mitchel, the

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[133] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 305-306.
[134] *The Nation*, 14 February 1846; *The Southern Citizen*, 4 February 1858.
[135] *The Southern Citizen*, 21 January 1858.

vogue for international philanthropic endeavors was "a species of nationalist polygamy ... [in which] your true cosmopolite ... [was] a lover on too large a scale to love at all."[137] The philanthropy seen in Ireland, such as various famine relief schemes, was little more than an admission that the people had been robbed of their traditional safeguards, that is, their traditional relationship to both the land and their leaders. The Irish, Mitchel insisted, were not so foolish as to believe that those schemes were gifts from a benign, paternalistic, and "civilizing" imperial government. His implication, of course, was that an event such as the Famine would never have occurred in a traditional, conservative society (such as he believed the South to be), and that the liberal concept of philanthropy (in this case, state welfare) was a poor substitute for traditional social obligations and relationships.

Mitchel's anti-imperialism was in many ways classically conservative.[138] It also, however, reflected the radicalism of those such as his fellow Young Irelander James Fintan Lalor, and Socialist theorist Karl Marx. Like Mitchel, Lalor and Marx viewed the landlord aristocracy as vitally invested in empire. Before his arrest in 1848 Mitchel had closely identified with Lalor's critique of landlordism, and his argument that peasant proprietorship was the bedrock of independent nationality.[139] Lalor too had linked landlord capitalism with imperialism. His goal, he said, was "not to repeal the Union ... but to repeal the Conquest – not to disturb or dismantle the Empire, but to abolish it

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[136] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 312.
[137] *The Nation*, 7 February 1846.
[138] John Newsinger, "John Mitchel and Irish Nationalism," *Literature and History* 6, no. 2 (1980), 191. Newsinger describes Mitchel as a "conservative revolutionary" whose hatred of modern civilization was transferred onto Britain because in addition to being Ireland's oppressor it was the most "advanced" nineteenth-century society.

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forever ... and to raise up a free people ... based on a peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land."[140] Karl Marx predicted that such a tenant revolution against Irish landlordism would trigger imperial collapse and ultimately, a worldwide class war. Like Mitchel, he viewed England as the "metropolis of landlordism and capitalism all over the world." "To accelerate the social development in Europe," Marx argued, "you must push on the catastrophe of official England. To do so, you must attack her in Ireland. That's her weakest point. Ireland lost, the British 'Empire' is gone, and the class war in England, till now somnolent and chronic, will assume acute forms."[141]

Like Marx and Lalor, Mitchel saw landlordism as a critical link in the imperial chain. He was not a Socialist, however, and although his critique of empire bore similarities to that of Marx, he viewed Irish independence in terms of a vindication of nationality, rather than as a prelude to social revolution in the Marxist sense. He did not consider Marx's vision of modernity as any more appealing than that suggested by liberalism. Mitchel's vision of the Irish future did not involve a Socialist Utopia. It was based rather on what he thought he saw in the American South. The abolition of landlordism, he believed, would shatter the imperial connection and would recast Ireland as a nation of land-owning farmers. Like Southern plantation owners, these independent farmers would produce a society imbued with the nobler qualities Mitchel believed absent from much of nineteenth century political and public culture. He defended

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[139] Quinn, "John Mitchel," 96.

[140] *The Irish Felon*, 24 June 1848.

[141] Karl Marx to Paul and Laura Lafargue, 5 March 1870. Published in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Engels on Ireland and the Irish Question* (Moscow: Progress Press, 1971). See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_03_05a.htm

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Southern slavery because he saw the question as a defining issue in the battle between tradition and encroaching modernity. The aberration, as he had explained to his friend, was not slavery, but the nineteenth century itself.

Mitchel's anti-imperialism, as can clearly be seen, was formulated in the context of a deep aversion to the values of nineteenth-century liberalism. The spread of British influence, whether formal or informal, was invariably marked by the appearance of that ideology's destructive components: political economy and philanthropy. To "free Ireland," Mitchel said, would be to "destroy the British Empire," for Irish independence would expose the entire liberal agenda as false, destructive, and self-serving.[142] Mitchel opposed Empire on the basis that it was by definition destructive to the Nation, and by its relation to political economy, destructive to Society. Imperialism and capitalism were two parts of the same "British System." Everywhere it touched, whether London, Dublin, or New York, political economy had created a fragmented and debased society.

In Ireland, imperialism had shown its dreadful potential in the form of a national calamity: the Famine. This event, more than any explicitly imperial activity, was what drove Mitchel's hatred of Empire. Though it was an "integral" part "of the richest Empire in the world," and although it was "the most fertile part of that Empire ... in Ireland, myriads and millions of human beings [were] half dead for want of food."[143] Just as the wage laborer was exploited by the factory owner, so was Ireland exploited by the Empire. Colonial economies were always subordinate to the imperial economy, and the flow of capital would, Mitchel believed, always place Ireland at a disadvantage. Any

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[142] *The Irish Citizen*, 16 November 1867.

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improvement in Irish fortunes would be harnessed to benefit the Empire, he argued, while any setback would be Ireland's burden alone. When, he said, one understood that these were the terms of imperial "partnership," the suggestion that Ireland might accept anything less than a complete break with the British Empire was insulting. Mitchel's insistence that nationality was incompatible with empire was to prove attractive to a broad variety of nationalists. His version of anti-imperialism, with its mixture of radicalism and reaction, had, as will be seen, an enduring presence in Irish nationalist discourse.

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Thomas Davis's anti-imperialism was nationalist in the strictest sense of the term. It was based on a broad and not very clearly defined vision of independence as the harbinger of Irish national regeneration. His approach may be summed up in the observation of another Young Irelander who declared that, "no imperial hand [could] bestow the prosperity which the national soul [had] the power to create."[144] Davis equated British imperialism with cultural degeneracy and utilitarianism. He lamented the spread into Ireland of that "damned thing" which measured "prosperity by exchangeable value, [measured] duty by gain, and [limited] desire to clothes, food and respectability."[145] Davis feared that the connection with Britain was facilitating the

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[143] *The Nation*, 2 January 1847.

[144] Thomas Francis Meagher, quoted in Patricia Lloyd, "Young Ireland: The Rise of Cultural Nationalism and Its Failure in the Rebellion of 1848" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1974), 6. The original quotation can be found in *The Nation*, 16 January 1847.

[145] T. Davis, *Literary and Historical Essays 1846*, 7.

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spread of such ideas. The British people, he believed, had been reduced to a depraved

materialism, while their society, driven by the "tyranny of accumulation" had become a

"manufacturing despotism."[146] Davis argued that Irish nationality would never find

expression as long as British imperialism continued to put its stamp on Irish life.

Irish nationalist anti-imperialism would be defined along the lines John Mitchel

set in the 1850s and 1860s. Mitchel's anti-imperialism, while incorporating the

underlying nationalist assumptions of the Davis model, was ultimately a repudiation of

empire based on the rejection of what he believed were its constituent parts:

cosmopolitanism, materialism, predatory capitalism, and intrusive and destructive social

policies. If Thomas Davis had supplied the language and the wider horizon, it was

Mitchel who defined an anti-imperial nationalism broad enough to appeal to a wide range

of nationalist constituencies. The British Empire, he said was "the foulest and most

brutal tyranny that ever deformed the world and affronted the Sun." It "had to be

destroyed, [had to] be abolished utterly as an Empire [and] deprived of the power of

living and fattening upon other people's industry."[147]

Mitchel has often been portrayed as the progenitor of the "introspective and

backward-looking" Irish nationalism that emerged in the early twentieth century.[148]

While he was unquestionably an important influence for conservative figures such as

Patrick Pearse, Mitchel should also be seen in the context of his contribution to more

radical strands of nationalist thought. His insistence on the mutuality between

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[146] *The Nation*, 16 and 23 August 1845 cited in Molony, *A Soul*, 329.
[147] *The Irish Citizen*, 14 December 1867.
[148] Quinn, "John Mitchel," 108.

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imperialism and capitalism, as the next chapter will demonstrate, made particular sense to

many Gilded Age Irish Americans who came to view the labor struggle and the Irish

national struggle as part of a combined assault on a trans-Atlantic oligarchy. While

Mitchel was not the sole inspiration for this development, his ideas provided a nationalist

framework in which it was possible for Irish Americans to be agitators for radical reform

in some regards, and profoundly conservative in others. Irish Americans refused to

endorse abolitionism on some of the same grounds as had Mitchel. Unlike him, however,

many of them were deeply disturbed at the prospect of Southern secession.[149] This

divergence provides some insight into the Irish-American anti-imperial discourse, which

while it certainly echoed the ideas of Mitchel, was also uniquely American.

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[149] Mitchel believed the South should continue to resist abolition even if this was to require the "break up of the Union." John Mitchel to Mrs. Williams, 1 May 1859, NLI MS 3226 (Hickey Collection).

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Chapter II

Irish-American Anti-Imperialism, 1870-1900

There was a vibrant and dynamic anti-imperial discourse within Irish-American

nationalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In fact, in the immediate

aftermath of John Mitchel's death in 1875, the most radical Irish anti-imperialism was

found not among nationalists in Ireland, but among those in the United States. The

chapter will establish the contours of Irish-American political identity before going on to

explain how aspects of that identity contributed to a radical anti-imperial critique in the

1870s and 1880s. At the time, this discourse echoed Mitchel's critique of political

economy, and drew an explicit connection between capitalism and imperial exploitation.

The basis of Irish-American anti-imperialism changed in the 1890s, however, when the

United States itself began to pursue an imperial policy. The impetus behind Irish-

American nationalist anti-imperialism shifted in that period toward a defense of

Catholicism, and the preservation of American republicanism. The religious connotations

of imperialism took shape within the context of a renewed wave of anti-Catholic

nativism. Irish-American nationalists believed that America's pursuit of empire

furthermore represented an unprecedented threat to the nation's political traditions and institutions. A final section of the chapter will outline the response of nationalists in Ireland to the advent of American imperialism.

I – Irish-American Nationalist Identity[1]

Irish-American nationalist discourse, while certainly linked to the nationalist discourse in Ireland, must also be seen in the context of the Irish experience in the United States. Most histories of the Irish in America have sought to establish what role ethnic nationalism played in the lives of people struggling for a foothold in a new country. The extent of the Irish-American involvement in the Irish nationalist project suggests that emigrant nationalism was driven by more than a simple desire to express ethnic solidarity. Kerby Miller views Irish-American participation in the nationalist project not as a function of the American experience, but as a product of the immigrant's antecedent experience in Ireland. Nationalist activity, he argues, was a straightforward expression of the immigrant's sense of exile, loss, and resentment.[2]

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[1] As in nineteenth-century Ireland itself, the majority of those Irish Americans who subscribed to nationalism were Catholic. As a group, Irish-American Catholics were overwhelmingly concentrated in the Northeast, Mid-West, and West (typically in urban centers). Irish Protestants had their own tradition of patriotism (particularly in the eighteenth century), but they did not identify with nineteenth century Irish nationalism in significant numbers (there are notable exceptions such as among the leaders of Young Ireland). The political identity of Protestant Irish Americans (most of whom lived in the South) is still largely unexplored. Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Longman, 2000), 1-5.
[2] Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For a cogent analysis of the debate of the broad perspectives of these three authors, see Victor Walsh, "A Fanatic Heart: The Cause of Irish-American Nationalism in Pittsburgh During the Gilded Age," *Journal of Social History*, 15, no. 2 (1981), 187-188.

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In contrast to Miller, Thomas Brown and Eric Foner both explain Irish-American nationalism in terms of the Irish immigrant's relationship to, and assimilation into, American society. Brown argues that Irish immigrants felt their inferior position in American society to be at least partly attributable to Ireland's colonial status. Irish independence and the restoration of Ireland's national dignity, they believed, would inevitably improve Irish Catholic standing in the United States. The underlying assumption of Brown's argument is that Irish Americans ultimately engaged in nationalist politics because they were driven by a desire for a specifically American form of middle-class respectability.[3] Eric Foner, among others, has, however, challenged Brown's characterization of Irish Americans as having been motivated by bourgeois aspirations. Many Irish immigrants to the United States, according to Foner, saw in nationalism a chance to express their commitment to working-class and oppositional politics in a direct challenge to the middle-class *status quo*. Foner's study of the Irish role in Gilded Age radical politics suggests that many Irish Americans viewed nationalism as a natural corollary of the broader movement for economic, political, and social reform.[4]

Each of these approaches has provided valuable insight into Irish-American nationalism. The analytical frameworks they offer, however, are quite broad and they shed little light on some of the more subtle themes within Irish-American political ideology. Neither are the traditional approaches particularly good at explaining the relationship between emigrant nationalism and nationalism as it developed within Ireland

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[3] Thomas Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963).

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itself. The Irish-American nationalist discourse on empire in the 1880s, for example,

took shape along quite different lines than nationalist anti-imperialism in Ireland in the

same period. There is a need for a more nuanced analysis of the nationalist project, one

in which this kind of variance makes sense. Historians have recently begun to offer such

analyses.

John Belchem, for example, has argued that historians "need to assess the Irish

nationalist project within the operation of specific political cultures."[5] Citing as an

example the Irish-American response to Young Ireland's disastrous 1848 rebellion,

Belchem demonstrates that Irish nationalists in the United States expressed themselves in

the idiom of the indigenous political culture, in this case, in the language of American

republicanism. The lack of popular support in Ireland for the 1848 insurrection was

particularly devastating to Irish Americans, he claims, because it could be construed as

evidence that the Irish people were not ready to embrace republicanism. This, by

implication, tarnished the civic credentials of their American counterparts because it

indicated that they were not entirely suited to living in a country where republicanism

was the foundation of civic life.[6] Irish-American nationalism in the 1870s and 1880s had

a more radical political tone than had the nationalist discourse in Ireland because it

developed in an atmosphere of American republicanism. It was an assertion both of

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[4] Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980);
[5] John Belchem, "Nationalism, Republicanism and Exile: Irish Emigrants and the Revolutions of 1848," *Past and Present* 146 (Feb. 1995), 135.
[6] Ibid., 112.

Ireland's right to autonomy and of the Irish-American's right to participate in American democracy.

Malcom Campbell too has argued that variations within Irish nationalism are best explained in the context of the specific political culture in which particular groups of nationalists lived. He compares the ethnic nationalism of Irish Americans and Irish Australians. When each group is placed within the context of its respective political culture, he argues, it becomes immediately clear why the Australian variety of Irish nationalism was much more moderate than that of Irish nationalists in the United States. The Australian Irish took their ideological cues not from some imaginary nationalist headquarters in Ireland, but rather, from the imperial political culture in which they lived. Their nationalism, Campbell argues, coexisted with a desire to assimilate into the dominant political culture of their new home.[7] The basis of that political culture was Australia's imperial connection to Britain. While, therefore, it was possible for Irish nationalists to be anti-imperial in mid-nineteenth-century Australia, such a stance, given the imperial nature of the political culture, was likely to limit the extent to which they could engage in Australian civic life. To participate in Australian civic life was to recognize the British Empire. Irish-Australian nationalism, as a result, did not hinge on a rejection of the imperial idea. Taken together, what the Belchem and Campbell analyses suggest is that the history and the political culture of the United States encouraged Irish

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[7] Malcom Campbell, "Irish Nationalism and Immigrant Assimilation: Comparing the United States and Australia," *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 16 no. 2 (1996): 24-43.

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Americans to express their nationalism in explicitly republican and anti-imperial language.

The nationalist discourse in Ireland developed in a quite different ideological framework than that in the United States. As in Australia, Irish political culture in the second half of the nineteenth century was overshadowed by the connection to the British Empire. This is not to say that anti-imperialism did not exist in Ireland at the time. On the contrary, it had been a critical part of the nationalist ideology of Thomas Davis and John Mitchel. The nationalist project in Ireland in the 1880s was dominated, however, not by the heirs of Mitchel, but by relative moderates whose very participation in politics was an implicit recognition of the imperial connection. The Irish Party's nationalist agitation took place in the imperial parliament at Westminster. Its Home Rule program, moreover, called for the modification of the imperial relationship, not its destruction.[8]

Expressions of Irish nationalism which functioned to uphold the established order in America were, by definition, revolutionary in an Irish context. This much is illustrated by the 1861 controversy surrounding the funeral arrangements for the former Young Ireland revolutionary Terence McManus. McManus died in the United States and his supporters wished to hold two public funerals, one in New York and one in Dublin (where he was to be buried). Archbishop Hughes of New York, known for his political and social conservatism, saw no difficulty in granting permission for a full funeral Mass for the republican McManus. When the body was brought to Ireland, however, Archbishop Cullen of Dublin flatly refused permission for a Catholic ceremony. If in

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New York, McManus's funeral was viewed as unthreatening and even, complementary to

the republican political order, in Dublin his very memory was an implicit threat to British

imperial power.[9]

Within this broadly republican framework, Irish-American nationalism developed

several other sub-themes. The more central of these themes become apparent in the

context of the Irish-American rejection of abolition in the mid-nineteenth century. There

has been a significant amount of research on Irish-American identity in this period and

much of it focuses on the Irish attitude toward slavery and abolition. What this research

confirms is that most Irish in the United States, far from joining the movement for

African-American emancipation, steadfastly opposed abolition.[10] The Irish-American

rejection of abolition in the 1840s and 1850s is particularly striking when seen in the

context of the Irish nationalist project in those years. Daniel O'Connell, unquestionably

the leading Irish nationalist (in both Ireland and the United States) of his day, was

strongly in support of abolition, and he favored an alliance between his Repeal

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[8] For more on the Home Rule program and the Irish Parliamentary Party's attitude to empire, see Chapter 3.
[9] Louis Bisceglia, "The Fenian Funeral of Terence Bellew McManus," *Éire Ireland*, 14 no. 3 (1979): 45-64.
[10] Much of the literature on the Irish rejection of abolition builds on the arguments in Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism," *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 894. For a discussion of the key issues in the debate see Kenny, *The American Irish*, 80-87; Brian Kelly, "Ambiguous Loyalties: The Boston Irish, Slavery, and the Civil War," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 24, no. 2 (1996): 165-204; Howard Temperly, "The O'Connell-Stevenson Contretemps: A Reflection of the Anglo-American Slavery Issue," *Journal of Negro History*, 47, no. 4 (1962): 217-233; Michael Fellman, "Theodore Parker and the Abolitionist Role in the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, 61, no. 3 (1974): 666-684. For the Irish response to the Civil War, see Frank Klement, "Catholics as Copperheads During the Civil War," *Catholic Historical Review*, 80, no. 1 (1994): 36-57; Benjamin Blied, *Catholics and the Civil War* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1945); Madeleine Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy* (Gloucester MA: P. Smith, 1964). For African-American attitudes toward Irish Americans see Lee Jenkins, "The Black O'Connell: Frederick Douglass and Ireland," *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 13 (1999): 22-46 and Arnold Shankman, "Black on Green: Afro-American Editors on Irish Independence, 1840-1921," *Phylon*, 41, no. 3 (1980): 284-299.

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Association and William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society. O'Connell said in 1829 that, "of all men living, an American citizen who is the owner of slaves is the most despicable."[11] Most nationalist newspapers in Ireland echoed his criticism of American slavery. Irish-American nationalists, however, rejected O'Connell's attempt to link Irish nationalism with the movement for abolition. Like nearly all Americans at the time, the Irish were racist; but according to recent historiography, they were also victims of racism themselves, and their actions were in part motivated by a desire to demonstrate that they were fully "white."[12] Aside from obvious racial prejudice, there were several religious, economic, and political reasons for the Irish-American nationalist resistance to abolition. The specific points of resistance are important, because they highlight the fundamental tenets of Irish-American identity, and consequently, of Irish-American nationalist political ideology.

First, abolition's British ties led some Irish to argue that Garrison's movement was actually a piece of liberal hypocrisy designed to hide a cunning plot to undermine the stability of the United States. As did John Mitchel, many Irish Americans scoffed at what they characterized as Britain's sudden attack of conscience. The Boston *Pilot* asked how "the exiled victims of British oppression" could be expected to "relinquish the hate they bear the oppressor, and lend their influence for the furtherance of his subtle

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[11] Quoted in Temperly, "The O'Connell-Stevenson Contretemps," 219.

[12] David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York : Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verson, 1994), 164-5, 184-8.

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schemes" in America.[13] Garrison's *Liberator* denounced as "ludicrous" the notion that abolition was a British plot, but the charge proved very difficult to combat.[14] The rather abstract argument that by supporting abolition the Irish would demonstrate to the British their commitment to progress and "civilization" (thus inducing Britain to grant Repeal) did not strike many Irish Americans as very plausible.

Second, certain strands of abolition had a pronounced anti-Catholic tone.[15] Regardless of whether or not piety and doctrine featured prominently in their lives, the Catholic Church was often the one familiar landscape feature for new immigrants from Ireland.[16] The perception that abolitionists were hostile to the Irish because of their Catholicism was cited by a correspondent to the *Liberator,* who commented that, "in ten cases for one where an Irishman is taunted and insulted, the insult" is dealt out by those "most clamorous against the slave system."[17] Garrison was mildly anti-Catholic in comparison to other abolitionists such as the Reverend Theodore Parker.[18] While he denounced nativism in general, however, he often blamed Catholic priests for the obduracy of their flock. The priests, he said, were "cunning," "designing," and "crafty" manipulators of ordinary Catholics.[19] Garrison's criticism of the clergy almost cost him

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[13] Boston *Pilot*, 12 Feb 1842. Also cited in Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 13.

[14] *Liberator*, 25 March 1842.

[15] Fellman, "Theodore Parker," 677-678.

[16] Kenny, *The American Irish*, 71, 77-80. Also, Kelly, "Ambiguous Loyalties," 177-178. After the 1830s, most immigrants from Ireland were Catholic.

[17] *Liberator*, 24 June 1842.

[18] Fellman, "Theodore Parker," 677-678.

[19] *Liberator*, 25 March 1842; *Liberator*, 8 April 1842; quoting Garrison's letter to Dublin abolitionist Richard Allen in Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 22.

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the support of Daniel O'Connell. A devout Catholic himself, O'Connell threatened to withdraw his backing for abolition if the attacks on the clergy continued.[20]

A third factor in the Irish rejection of abolition was the failure of Garrison and others to convince skeptical Irish Americans that the end of slavery would not result in their being put in an even more tenuous economic position than they already held. Abolitionist philosophy was individualistic in that it conceived of liberty in personal rather than in collective or economic terms. "The Garrisonian condemnation of the labor system of slavery," in addition, "was more often moral than economic."[21] Abolitionists did not effectively address the fear that slavery's end would result in a flood of cheaper African-American labor from the South, and the consequent displacement of the Irish in unskilled positions in Northern cities. That we know this did not happen after 1863 does not retrospectively negate the genuine fears of Northern, and particularly, Irish workers.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of abolitionist philosophy, at least as far as Irish-American nationalists were concerned, was Garrison's stated willingness to push for the break-up of the American Union should the Southern states refuse to abandon slavery.[22] One Irish-American newspaper denounced what it characterized as the abolitionist leader's "insane crusade against the American Union."[23] Garrison's attempt to frame his argument in the form of an Irish analogy was not successful: "I am for the repeal of the union between England and Ireland," he said, "because it is not founded in

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[20] Osofsky, "Abolitionists," 903; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 29.
[21] Osofsky, "Abolitionists," 890.
[22] Jenkins, "The Black O'Connell," 28.
[23] Quoted in *Liberator*, 29 April 1842.

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equity, [and] on the same ground, and for the same reason, I am for the repeal of the union between the North and South."[24] Statements such as this offended Irish Americans, both as Irish nationalists and American patriots. The Irish, like many immigrant groups, were anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to American institutions. They were especially devoted to the Constitution, a document that many abolitionists had condemned as flawed and even sinful. The *Pilot* declared that "the high admiration [Irish Americans] feel for the essential characteristics of the American Constitution, is too deep and controlling to allow them to engage in a question which imperils the only free government in the world."[25]

The Irish-American nationalist rejection of abolition reveals what would be the recurring themes in Irish-American political culture in the nineteenth century. Irish Americans were vigilantly on guard against any perceived encroachment of "British" ideas into American life and any indication that the United States might establish closer diplomatic ties with the British Empire. Repeated waves of nativism left Irish Americans hyper-sensitive to charges that Catholics were unsuited to democratic citizenship. Third, the Irish-American adherence to any movement, even Irish nationalism itself, had to be able to be reconciled with collective class identity, whether that identity was working-class or middle-class. Finally, Irish Americans characterized themselves as the devoted guardians of American institutions, and they resisted any developments that could be perceived as undermining those institutions and founding principles. The same concerns

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[24] *Liberator*, 8 April 1842.
[25] Boston *Pilot*, 25 February 1842. Osofsky, "Abolitionists," 902.

and values that underpinned the Irish-American nationalist rejection of abolition also underpinned that group's anti-imperialism from the 1870s onward. Just as had been Mitchel's anti-imperialism, the Irish American critique of empire would have both reactionary and radical strands. In the 1870s and 1880s, that anti-imperialism manifested as a radical critique of American society and international capitalism.

II – Patrick Ford, Labor Radicalism, and Irish-American Anti-Imperialism

Whereas in the 1850s and 1860s the majority of Irish Americans might be said to have vigorously defended the *status quo*, the post war years saw many of them mobilize along much more oppositional lines.[26] Gilded-Age Irish Americans were central players in the wave of radicalism that swept the nation in the 1870s and 1880s. Although gradually assimilating to American life, the majority of Irish continued to be near the bottom of the social order. They were thus particularly vulnerable during periods of economic depression such as occurred in the 1870s. In the struggle for survival Irish-American nationalists developed a distinct voice that reflected their identity as Catholics, as (for the most part) workers, as Irish nationalists, and as republican Americans. Anti-imperialism emerged in this context as a means of articulating the different components of Irish-American nationalist identity. The Irish-American critique of imperialism was obviously intended to assert Ireland's right to independence. It was also, however, a way

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in which to express concerns about labor's relationship to capital. Irish Americans had

rejected the abolition movement based on its perceived incompatibility with their

identity. Anti-imperialism, in contrast, promised to recognize the issues at the heart of

the Irish-American nationalist experience.

Few people had a better grasp of what those issues were than Patrick Ford (1837-

1913). Ford was the editor and proprietor of New York's *Irish World* [*and American*

Industrial Liberator], one of the highest circulating Irish-American newspapers of its

time.[27] While the content of his paper was often the epitome of ethnic self-absorption, it

also reflected his commitment to what he understood as America's founding principles, a

devotion that, at times, bordered on the fanatical. Ford is important for a number of

reasons. Most obviously, his role at the *Irish World* made him one of a small group of

individuals in a position to shape Irish-American political discourse. Significantly in this

regard, the paper was also distributed in Ireland and to the Irish population in Britain.

"There was scarcely a cabin in the West," according to the Irish MP William O'Brien, "to

which some relative in America did not dispatch a weekly copy of the *Irish World*,

flaming all over from the first line to the last ... it was as if some vast Irish-American

invasion was sweeping the country with new and irresistible principles of Liberty and

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[26] Foner, "The Land League and Irish America," in Foner, *Politics and Ideology*. See also, David Brundage, "After the Land League: The Persistence of Irish-American Labor Radicalism in Denver, 1897-1905," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 11, no. 3 (1992): 3-26, 6.

[27] *The Irish World*, 4 October 1913 and Boston *Pilot*, 25 September 1886; James Rodechko, "An Irish American Journalist and Catholicism," *Church History* 39 no. 4 (1970): 524-540, 524. The paper's circulation was at least 100,000 in the 1890s.

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Democracy."[28] Ford's more than forty years of fund-raising (over one million dollars)

also gave him access to, and influence over many of the day's leading Irish nationalists.

He was an opinion maker in every sense of the term.

Ford's name is reasonably well-known among historians, but his career has not

received the kind of attention that one would expect for a man who spent forty years at

the helm of a very influential newspaper. One reason for this is that, apart from the *Irish

World,* there is a critical lack of primary source material on Ford, who apparently ordered

his personal papers destroyed upon his death.[29] Unlike his contemporary (and rival), John

Devoy, who wrote compulsively about his own exploits, Ford left no memoir. Historical

interest in him has typically centered on two aspects of his career; his role as a radical

social reformer in the 1870s and early 1880s, and his support for physical force

nationalism in roughly the same period.[30] The disproportionate emphasis on the earliest

part of his career has meant that Ford is often reduced to a stereotype; the Anglophobic

Irish American whose chief contributions to Irish nationalism were dollars and

dynamite.[31] The Irish MP Frank Hugh O'Donnell, for example, labeled Ford an "apostle

of crime," and lamented that the Irish Party at Westminster had ever become dependent

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[28] William O'Brien, *Recollections* (London: MacMillan, 1905), 272-274. Michael Davitt's first encounter with the *Irish World* was when it was sneaked in to him as a prisoner in a British jail. See T.W. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 175.

[29] James Rodechko, *Patrick Ford and His Search for America: A Case Study in Irish-American Journalism 1870-1913* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), vii.

[30] While he refused to condemn various bomb attacks in London, there is no evidence that Ford was directly linked with such activity. Joseph O'Grady, *Irish Americans and Anglo-American Relations, 1880-88* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 168-69; Florence Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs 1848-1892* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 330; Thomas Beach, *Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service* (London: Heinemann, 1892), 131-34.

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on his "dirty dollars."[32] To dismiss Ford's philosophy as one-dimensional Anglophobia,

however, is to grossly simplify the thinking of a man, who in many ways was closer to

the pulse of Irish-American nationalism than any of his contemporaries.

Born in Galway, Ford emigrated with his family to Boston in the mid-1840s. He

worked on several Boston newspapers, including Garrison's *Liberator,* before joining the

Ninth Massachusetts regiment of the Union army. Ford fought at Fredericksburg and

after the war, he lived for a time in South Carolina. He moved back to New York in 1870

and began publishing the *Irish World* that year. While he was clearly fascinated with the

possibilities promised by social and political reform, Ford was also keenly aware that

such reform might not automatically appeal to Irish-American nationalists, and that it

stood a better chance of doing so if it took that constituency's concerns into account.[33]

His own career intersected both the anti-slavery movement in the 1850s and the anti-

imperial campaign of the 1890s.[34] Although he seems to have become increasingly

socially conservative after the Haymarket riots, anti-imperialism nonetheless remained,

throughout his career, a central theme in his Irish nationalism.[35] The *Irish World* would

be as anti-imperial in 1899 as it was in 1879, although its critique of empire in the two

periods would be on quite different grounds. Ford, as will be seen, was particularly adept

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[31] Despite their giving considerable coverage to Irish-American nationalism, the two most recent and most influential syntheses of Irish history do not discuss Patrick Ford at all: See Foster, *Modern Ireland* and Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).
[32] Frank Hugh O'Donnell, *A History of the Irish Parliamentary Party* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), 323, 369.
[33] *The Irish World,* 14 October 1913.
[34] Boston *Pilot,* 25 September 1886.

at defining a nationalist anti-imperial discourse capable of adapting to the changing circumstances of Irish Americans. He denounced imperialism as un-American, anti-Catholic, anti-national, and potentially disastrous for labor. Depending on the time period, different aspects of Irish-American identity were prioritized over others.

The *Irish World's* attack on empire had, on the surface, much in common with earlier Irish anti-imperialism. As had Davis and Mitchel, Ford frequently presented case cases from around the world whereby "the malarial influence of British rule" might be exposed.[36] In a series of open letters to Gladstone in 1881, he "[impeached] the British Empire ... of world-crimes, perpetrated in all lands and coming down for centuries; each crime being the logical antecedent, or consequence, of some other crime; and all, taken collectively, constituting a system of diabolism such as [had] never been equaled since the day that man came upon this planet." Ford summoned England "to the bar of Christendom," where he charged the British with disinheriting "God's children, plunder[ing] labor, and [debasing] the masses."[37] Each case of imperial "savagery" was carefully catalogued for use in the *Irish World's* stinging editorials. A January 1882 headline declared "Civilization Horrified" by British actions in Egypt. "Noble Alexandria," the paper claimed, had been "sacrificed to British Mammon."[38] The paper's coverage several years later of General Gordon's death in Khartoum was unapologetically

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[35] Rodechko, *Patrick Ford*, 89-91; Sabina Taylor, "Patrick Ford and His Pursuit of Social Justice" (Masters Thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada, 1993). Taylor argues that while his tactics changed, Ford's commitment to reform issues remained consistent throughout his career.

[36] *The Irish World*, 3 January 1874.

[37] Patrick Ford, *The Criminal History of the British Empire* (New York: *The Irish World* Printers, 1915). The essays appeared in the *Irish World* in March 1881 although the collection was not published until after Ford's death.

celebratory. Several editorials at the time ended with the cheer, "Hurrah for the

Mahdi!"[39] Conditions in British India proved yet another favorite theme. That country's

"ghastly visitations of famine" were compared to those in Ireland in the 1840s.[40] The

"slow, searching, chronic scarcity created by British rapacity [was] the same in both

countries" according to the *Irish World*.[41] As had John Mitchel, Ford declared

imperialism to be "the greatest fraud of the century."[42] No amount of cant about

promoting "civilization," he insisted, could disguise the fact that the British Empire was a

"pirate business" run by a class of "pious freebooters."[43]

Denunciations of imperial aggression became a regular feature of the *Irish World*

in the late 1870s and early 1880s. This reflected the corresponding increase in British

imperial activity (partly in response to the Russian threat to India, and partly due to the

crises the Empire faced in Egypt, Ireland, and the Sudan). There is a palpable sense of

expectation in the paper's coverage of these crises. As had Thomas Davis in the 1840s,

Ford predicted that nothing could save the Empire were war to break out in the East and

West simultaneously. England's criminal aggression had made victims of the Irish, the

Indians, and the Africans, and Ford's paper called for solidarity among all those who

dwelt under the "Pirate Flag." Together, it argued, they might "combine in a holy

crusade to destroy the [imperial] system."[44] The theme of imperial collapse before a

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[38] *The Irish World*, 19 August 1882.
[39] Ibid., 21 February 1885.
[40] Ibid., 3 January 1874.
[41] Ibid., 11 November 1876.
[42] Ibid., 3 January 1880.
[43] Ibid.,12 August 1882 and 21 February 1885.
[44] Ford, *Criminal History*, essay two.

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wave of colonial solidarity was visited repeatedly in the paper's editorial cartoons. In one

cartoon the British Lion is depicted "at bay," pierced by arrows labeled Burma, India,

Zululand, and Canada. Another, entitled the "Bubble Empire," portrays a bloated John

Bull as about to be burst by swarming "India" and "Ireland" mosquitoes. A third

portrayed the Empire as a stately building collapsing in upon itself as a helpless John Bull

looked on.[45]

Ford's depiction of imperialism as "fraud" and his prediction of imperial collapse

were, of course, not particularly new themes. What was new was the way in which the

Irish World began to craft a distinctly American argument against imperialism. In this

reading, empire was the enemy, not only of nationalism, but of democracy and,

particularly, of the working class. Whether they knew it or not, Ford argued, the

American working class was *already* suffering at the hands of a kind of British

imperialism. Empire could take many forms and, as had John Mitchel, Ford depicted the

exploitation of American workers as driven by the same forces as imperialism. The *Irish*

World claimed to have uncovered in the United States a vast conspiracy, a creeping

capitalism aided and encouraged by the nefarious schemes of America's "would-be

aristocracy."[46] Ford warned his readers that it was the British Empire then "warring

against Humanity in every part of the globe," that these American "aristocrats" would

"have the United States take as its model."[47]

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[45] *The Irish World*, 21 May 1879, 26 July 1879, and 15 November 1879.
[46] Ibid., 18 August 1877.
[47] Ibid., January 1880.

Who were these new American "aristocrats" and imperial collaborators? They were, according to Ford, the railway kings, the factory owners, the political "bosses," the monopolists, and the money lenders; in short, anyone who made a profit or claimed privilege at the expense of the working man of woman. The hostility of this "vast horde of untitled conspirators" to the working class and to democratic principles was irrefutable evidence, to Ford at least, that they were inspired by British values and by British imperialism itself.[48] They were, he said, slavish admirers of the "Old World" who mindlessly aped British manners and pandered to British interests, even at the cost of American jobs and American national security. The *Irish World* claimed that members of this traitorous element had also risen to prominence in politics. A July 1884 editorial warned that "the extent of British influence in this country, and especially in Washington" was a "matter worthy of serious consideration."[49] The Washington aristocrats were conspicuous for their support of "class legislation" which, Ford argued, was intended to divide the nation and undermine the Constitution.[50] The new breed of "bastard American kings" threatened to be the ruin of America just as the "lords, earl squireens, and half-sirs [had] been the ruin of Ireland."[51] Their aim was to strip the working class of all political, economic, and social rights, and thus "to reduce [them] to the condition of serfs."[52] Just as "the empire only [enriched] the prince merchants," America's commercial and political oligarchies grew at the expense of the working class.

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[48] Ibid., 9 March 1872.
[49] *The Irish World*, 10 July 1884.
[50] Ibid., 27 May 1871.
[51] Ibid., March 1872.

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The "war between oligarchism and democracy" had to continue "until corrupt rings and class legislatures and monopolists" and all such "conspiracies against the people" were smashed.[53]

One of the most controversial issues in this war was free trade, a central component of political economy. The "reform" of the tariff was a hotly debated political question in the mid-1880s largely because both Republicans and Democrats in this period used the issue of tariff reform to carve out electoral coalitions among different segments of the population. Ford was adamantly opposed to free trade. Arguing that the theory "found its chief sustenance" among British political economists, the *Irish World* denounced free trade as a massive conspiracy against American industry and institutions. A young nation, it said, could not "develop itself as a great industrial and manufacturing center if brought into competition on precisely equal terms with an old established one." Americans had only to look to the examples of Ireland and India to see that free trade was an invariable precursor of economic ruin and imperial exploitation. Ford claimed that the British only wanted free trade at the time because they had *already* built "a gigantic monopoly" through "the plunder of half the world." There was one notable absence from their list of conquests, however: "The only thing that [cut] John Bull to the quick [was] his inability to number the United States among his helpless victims."[54] The introduction of free trade between the two countries would mean that "the industrial welfare of the United States" would invariably be "sacrificed in the interest of England." Declaring

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[52] *The Irish World*, 24 February 1872.
[53] Ibid., 27 May 1871.

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"human wages the American ideal," Ford made the free trade and protection debate a

question of anti-imperial resistance.[55]

His close ally, and indeed, the author of many of the *Irish World's* attacks on free

trade, was Professor Robert Ellis Thompson (1844-1924) of the University of

Pennsylvania. Like Ford, Thompson had been born in Famine-era Ireland, although he

was as devoutly Presbyterian as Ford was Catholic. Considered one of America's first

social scientists, Thompson was also an ordained minister who lectured on theology in

addition to economics.[56] It may have been this combination that appealed to Ford. Both

men clearly viewed oppression, whether national or economic, as varieties of the same

sin. Thompson, like his mentor H.C. Carey, was a confirmed protectionist who, in

addition to his work at the *Irish World,* lectured nationally on the necessity for a

protective tariff.[57] In the mid-1880s he published a pamphlet entitled *Ireland and Free*

Trade: An Object-Lesson in National Economy. In it he asked "what [had] free trade ever

done for Ireland?" a country which, under English economic control, was "neither

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[54] Ibid., 27 January 1877.

[55] Ibid.,18 October 1884.

[56] James H.S. Bossard, "Robert Ellis Thompson: Pioneer Professor in Social Science," *The American Journal of Sociology,* 35, no. 2. (1929), 241.

[57] Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879) was a prominent American critic of political economy. His suspicions regarding British intentions led him to formulate a theory of economic nationalism in which protection was a central feature. Francesco L. Nepa. "Carey, Henry Charles," *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000): http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-00098.html. For more on Thompson's views see Robert Ellis Thompson, *Political Economy with Especial Reference to the Industrial History of Nations* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1882); Robert Ellis Thompson, *Protection to Home Industry* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1886); David Noel Doyle, *Irish Americans, Native Rights and National Empires: Divisions and Attitudes of the Catholic Minority in the Decade of Expansion 1890-1901* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 233.

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prosperous nor contented."[58] It was no coincidence, he argued, that America's ports were jammed with economic refugees from free trade nations. The price of goods may indeed have been cheaper in free trade Ireland than in America, he said, but that was little consolation to the individual who could find no work in Ireland.[59] Free trade between America and Britain would not be an agreement among equals, according to Thompson. Despite its suggestive name, the system produced an uneven playing field where English industrial and commercial interests invariably gained at the expense of native industry. The whole concept of the British Empire, Ford and Thompson argued, had been built upon this very premise. Their case against free trade - that it facilitated the exploitation of the weak for the benefit of the strong - was the same case that John Mitchel had made against free labor.

Free trade may not have technically required the United States to rejoin Britain's Empire, they conceded, but the condition of Ireland, India, and Egypt clearly illustrated that "national independence [could] not stand when financial and industrial independence [were] gone."[60] A free trade agreement with Britain would thus amount to an imperial annexation in all but name. Ford became such a devout disciple of protection that he sought to turn Irish voters away from the Democrats based on the party's commitment to reducing and eventually abolishing America's protective tariff. The Irish, Ford said, were instinctively for protection because, "nineteen-twentieths of them [were] workingmen

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[58] Robert Ellis Thompson, *Ireland and Free Trade: An Object Lesson in National Economy* (United States: 1888), 13.

[59] Robert Ellis Thompson, "A Defense of the Protective Policy," in *The National Revenues*, ed. Albert Shaw (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & company, 1888), 84-85.

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[who looked] at the matter as a question of wages." The "would-be aristocracy," on the other hand, cared little about wages, and was actually gladdened by the prospect of closer ties to Britain. The *Irish World* made it very clear that the tariff question really amounted to a choice between "the American system" and "the British Colonial system."[61]

On a broader level, Ford billed the 1870s and early 1880s as the moment of truth in the battle between "Old World" style tyranny and the principle of democracy. Ford clearly perceived the United States as being at a crossroads, faced with deciding whether to forge ahead on its own path, or to rejoin the "Old World," with all that that might mean for labor, for the Irish, and for the Irish in America. Any rapprochement with Britain he viewed as an implicit endorsement of that country's occupation of Ireland. On the American landscape, Ford saw closer relations with Britain as evidence that the American elite was having second thoughts about democracy itself. In October 1878, the *Irish World*'s editorial cartoon depicted the British Empire as a huge serpent encircling the globe, its fangs poised to strike the United States. The accompanying commentary warned that the serpent had breathed her imperial spirit over the Republic, corrupting American society and its politics. It read:

> There she writhes, with her serpent folds crushing the people and poisoning the very air wherever she takes hold. Breathing even on our own snobs and corrupting their spirit ... Breathes her spirit through the whole traitor brood of our sucking aristocracy. Falls her poison shadow on our halls of legislation ands sinks her greedy soul into the hearts of its members. O, brothers, her last work is *here*! Here to beg where she cannot bully, to seduce where she cannot subdue. Her example and her influence are polluting all. Let the true men of the Republic

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[60] *The Irish World*, 30 September 1882.
[61] Patrick Ford, "The Irish Vote in the Pending Presidential Election," *North American Review* 147, no. 2 (1888), 187, 189.

awaken now to the great danger that impends over us. Let us wrest power in this Republic from the assassin hands that would drag our country into her accursed example and her paths of crime.[62]

Ford was making an anti-imperial pitch to his American readers in the hopes that a sense of common cause with Ireland would inspire reform at home and abroad.

Even before the 1879 Irish Land War, then, the *Irish World* connected the labor question in America with the land question in Ireland. The "New Departure" would mark the beginning of an even more aggressive push to enlist Americans and Irishmen in a common cause.[63] The widespread sense that 1870s American society no longer reflected American ideals inspired a wave of protest which reached a crescendo at roughly the same time as a Land War in Ireland seemed about to explode. At no time previously had there existed such a window of opportunity for those who believed America to hold the key to Ireland's future. Eric Foner's study of the American branch of the Irish Land League has shown how that organization "helped to transform specifically Irish grievances into a broader critique of American society in the Gilded Age." The *Irish World* at this time was *the* newspaper of the nationalist cause on both sides of the Atlantic, and Ford's own office became a "kind of headquarters for labor leaders and Irish nationalists" alike.[64] The war against landlordism, the *Irish World* declared, was "no mere Irish question," it was part of a much wider struggle "between Right and Wrong,

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[62] *The Irish World*, 19 October 1878.
[63] The "New Departure" of 1879 was a loose alliance between land reform radicals, separatist radicals, and Charles Stewart Parnell's radical wing of the Irish Parliamentary Party.
[64] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 158.

between Liberty and Despotism, between Greed and Humanity."[65] David Brundage has

shown that this kind of thinking was not confined to the New York Irish. Denver labor

leader Joe Murray argued that "it was not only the poor of Ireland who were suffering

from the tyranny of despotic and capitalist rule, but that the poor of *all* countries were

enslaved thereby."[66] It seemed as though John Mitchel's critique of political economy

and imperialism had taken three-dimensional form.

The *Irish World* promised that an Irish nationalist victory would become "the

inheritance of the toiling millions of every land" and that nowhere would that victory

resonate more loudly than in the United States.[67] As Ford told his mostly working class

readers:

> Let this contest to wrest the land of Ireland from the usurper ... be but carried
> forward to a victorious end and the great question of industrial emancipation this
> side of the Atlantic shall be placed on a new footing. If Ireland wins, America
> wins.[68]

An 1880 front-page illustration highlights the complex mix of issues on the reform

agenda. In the picture, a personification of "Truth" banishes dark clouds labeled

landlordism, usury, conquest, rent, selfishness, wage serfdom, and the spoils of war.

Under her feet lie both an eviction notice and a broken crow-bar, and in her hand she

holds a document entitled "Man's Rights and Duties." For a few brief years at least, it

seemed possible that the poor of Ireland and of America were about to wrest their

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[65] *The Irish World*, 6 December 1879.
[66] Brundage, "After the Land League," 6.
[67] *The Irish World*, 4 June 1881.
[68] Ibid.

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"natural" and "God-given" rights from their mutual oppressors.[69] Throughout this time,

Ford never wavered in his condemnation of empire, the greatest of all the grasping

monopolies. The British Empire operated on the same principles as the greediest New

England capitalist and "the downfall of that Empire [would be] the first step to lift up the

Human Race" whether in Ireland or the United States.[70] Never before, it seemed, had the

oppressed of these two nations been so united in their purpose.

And yet, despite all these auspicious signs, the movement was unable to sustain

momentum through even the mid-1880s. On the Irish front, Ford had been an

enthusiastic champion of Michael Davitt's ambitious land nationalization scheme.

Unfortunately, he was virtually the only supporter of the plan, and neither the

parliamentary nor the physical force element of the New Departure would countenance

Davitt's radical proposal.[71] Although the *Irish World* continued to call for a "No Rent"

plan to be implemented, it was eventually forced to moderate its tone or risk total

alienation from the nationalist movement as a whole. Several other factors, including the

conservative backlash after the Haymarket riots in Chicago in 1886, undermined Ford's

ability to push the radical agenda on the American front. Here too he gradually began to

distance himself from the more extreme elements of the reform movement. Ford

eventually broke his long association with the populist and single tax proponent, Henry

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[69] *The Irish World*, 21 August 1880.
[70] *The Irish World*, 6 December 1879.
[71] Jackson, *Ireland*, 191.

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George, over what he perceived as the latter's growing anti-Catholicism.[72] By the late

1880s, the *Irish World*'s talk of an international alliance between labor and the colonized

had dimmed, although Ford, often invoking events in India, still continued to speak in

terms of a pan-nationalist stand against empire.

The failure of the labor and nationalist alliance did not, at the time, appear to mark

a major set back for Irish-American nationalism in general. The American political scene

in the 1880s, and the increasingly visible Irish-American presence within it, contributed

to the raising of Irish-American nationalist expectations. Rapidly expanding and

increasingly politicized, the Irish-American population had begun to make itself heard in

American politics. An English visitor's comment reflected what was frequently the

perception (though an exaggeration) when he noted that, "the fate of a Presidential

election depends on the votes of a single state, New York, which is almost entirely

governed by the Irish vote."[73] In the elections of 1884 and 1888, in particular, the Irish

vote was perceived to be the one to win and, as a result, many politicians deliberately

took pro-nationalist positions on Irish questions. The Irish were further encouraged by

the fact that the United States was, throughout the 1880s, involved in a serious of minor

diplomatic scrapes with Britain, over fishing rights, the Panama Canal, and other issues.

The high point of Irish-American confidence came in the late 1880s with the senatorial

defeat of the Phelps-Rosebery extradition agreement between the United States and

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[72] David Brundage, "In Time of Peace, Prepare for War: Key Themes in the Social Thought of New York's Irish Nationalists, 1890-1916," *in The New York Irish*, eds. Ronald Bayor and Timothy Meagher (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
[73] Quoted in O'Grady, *Irish Americans*, 37, 23.

Britain. Irish-Americans had waged a huge public campaign against the treaty and its defeat suggested that they had succeeded in their self-appointed duty to maintain "New World" isolation and exceptionalism. Many politicians claimed to have opposed the treaty out of support for the Irish nationalist cause.

Joseph O'Grady has closely examined this period in American politics and he concludes that the Irish were indeed courted by politicians on both sides of the aisle, and that many of those politicians exhibited a strong degree of Anglophobia, ostensibly because of their support for Irish nationalism. He concludes, however, that the Irish influence, despite the perception of those like Ford, really did not have any significant impact on America's foreign policy, and specifically, upon its relations with Britain. Members of Congress may have expressed Anglophobic sentiment, but American diplomats were actually more friendly than ever before with their British counterparts, and they were anxious to dispel the notion that their country was a haven for Britain's enemies.[74] What O'Grady's analysis suggests is that, going into the 1890s, Irish Americans had an exaggerated opinion of their political clout and the extent to which American policy was in harmony with Irish nationalist political ideology. This goes some way to explain the shock many Irish Americans felt in the late 1890s when the United States both moved to establish closer relations with Britain and embarked on its own quest for empire.

The attempt by Patrick Ford and others to meld Irish nationalism and labor radicalism into one cosmopolitan reform movement is noteworthy despite its failure.

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Ford's initiative continued and enlarged upon John Mitchel's earlier anti-imperial critique of political economy and his argument that nineteenth-century economic liberalism was as destructive in the United States as it had been in Ireland. The economic critique of imperialism would resurface in early twentieth-century Irish nationalist discourse. James Connolly (Socialist, anti-imperialist, and 1916 revolutionary) linked explicitly the labor struggle and the anti-imperial one.[75] The inability of the labor anti-imperial initiative to sustain its momentum in the 1880s reveals much about the specific contours of Irish-American political ideology at the time. While Ford's arguments were clearly intended to appeal to the labor constituency (which abolitionists had ignored), they did not take fully into account broader themes within Irish-American identity such as the enduring loyalty to Catholicism and the Irish-American sensitivity to criticism of American institutions. The Irish-American anti-imperial discourse in the 1890s, in contrast, would be framed in terms both of a defense of Catholicism and an assertion of republican patriotism. Irish leaders did not set the terms of the debate in the 1890s, but their response to it produced an anti-imperial discourse in which Catholicism and republicanism replaced working-class radicalism as the basis of the Irish-American rejection of empire.

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[74] O'Grady, *Irish Americans*, 137-38.
[75] See Chapter 4.

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III – Irish-American Catholics and American Imperialism

While Patrick Ford backed down from the effort to join the cause of Irish nationalism with broader social reform, he did not abandon his campaign against imperialism. In the 1890s the Irish-American anti-imperial discourse would be based not on a critique of political economy, but rather on a perception of imperialism as inherently anti-Catholic. Underpinning Irish-American hostility to imperialism at the same time were fears that the United States itself was drifting toward a policy of imperial annexation. Irish-American nationalists responded with a vigorous anti-imperial campaign in the late 1890s. Turn of the century Irish-American anti-imperialism reflected the concerns of a people who were at once more socially established and more Catholic than they had been two decades earlier.[76] The religious connotations of imperialism took shape within the context of a renewed wave of anti-Catholic nativism (exacerbated by the American war against Catholic Spain).

To understand the nuances of the Irish response to American imperialism it is helpful to first understand their response in the 1890s to the reappearance of organized nativism. The decade was one of considerable religious and ethnic conflict, particularly in both New England and the Mid-West. As a group, the American Irish had become more assertive in the realm of civic participation, whether as school board members or city officials. Their more visible public presence was a source of some resentment to the traditional civic elite, largely made up of non-Catholics who were keen on maintaining

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what they claimed was the essential Protestant identity of the United States. Tensions increased in the early part of the decade when many areas, including New England, were hit by an economic depression.

In 1893, the American Protective Association (A.P.A) began to be active in the Northeast, after initially being confined to the Mid-Western states. As the organized voice of nativism, this secretive, oath-bound movement sought to draw attention to what it believed was a massive Catholic conspiracy against American democracy. Although primarily motivated by anti-Catholicism, the A.P.A. also targeted immigrants who, it claimed, "came to America, not for love of liberty, but because they could get more money for less work" there.[77] The organization was particularly active in industrial cities where large numbers of Catholics worked, lived, and, most importantly, voted. Much of the group's activity involved promoting Republican candidates who had shown themselves "sound" on the immigrant and Catholic questions.[78] The A.P.A. was the organized face of a widespread backlash against Catholics in American society. If Protestants were characterized as hard-working, independent, and sensible, Catholics were described as lazy, subservient, and superstitious. Even before the appearance of the A.P.A., there had long been sectarian tension in cities such as Boston.[79] The Boston *Pilot* gave extensive coverage to purported instances of anti-Catholic bigotry. It was a

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[76] Kenny, *The American Irish*, 164.

[77] *Boston Daily Standard*, 28 March 1895, quoted in Lawrence Kennedy, "Pulpits and Politics: Anti-Catholicism in Boston in the 1880s and 1890s," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 28, no. 1 (2000): 56-75, 68.

[78] Timothy Meagher, "Irish All the Time: Ethnic Consciousness Among the Irish in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1880-1905," *Journal of Social History*, 19, no. 2 (1985): 273-303.

[79] Kennedy, "Pulpits and Politics," 62.

particularly vocal critic of the public school curriculum, which, it claimed, contained many anti-Catholic texts.[80] Other articles warned readers that Protestant groups were making "strenuous efforts" to provide for destitute Catholic children, with the invariable result that the children converted to Protestantism.[81]

These clashes over the school curriculum and parade routes, while significant, were relatively minor flash points in the larger debate about the place of Catholics in the American society. One of the most sensational nativist accusations was that the United States had been infiltrated by militant agents of the Vatican (mostly Jesuits). According to this argument, Catholics, through their control of public school boards and municipal government, were preparing to overthrow American democracy, and to install as the country's leader the Pope. Indeed, the nativist element repeatedly questioned whether one could be both a Papal follower and a loyal American citizen. Catholics, nativists argued, were precluded from all forms of free-thinking, and consequently, aside from their unsuitability for democratic citizenship, they were especially unfit for public office. In his book, *Washington in the Lap of Rome*, Baptist minister Justin Dewey Fulton declared that, "no man who truckles to Romanism is fit to be a representative of a free people."[82]

The Irish response was to vigorously defend the compatibility of Catholicism with American democracy. In February 1890, for example, over 3,000 people in Worcester, Massachusetts attended a lecture entitled "The Catholic Church and the American

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[80] Boston *Pilot*, 8 March 1890.
[81] Boston *Pilot*, 1 March 1890.

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Republic." The paper was given by the Reverend Walter Elliott, whose goal it was to

show "the harmony between the Catholic doctrine of the natural dignity of man and [the

Catholic's] capability for successful self-government [along] the principles on which our

Government is based."[83] Two months later the Reverend Robert Fulton, S.J. gave a

lecture in which he defended the proposition "loyalty to the Church is not inconsistent

with the highest type of American citizenship."[84] The accusations flew back and forth

between the two sides, and occasionally, as in Boston in 1895, erupted in violence.[85]

One of the basic assumptions behind 1890s nativism was that the essential

American identity was not simply white and European, but specifically, Anglo Saxon.

That term in its nineteenth-century incarnation had become synonymous with

Protestantism.[86] The Anglo-Saxon "temperament," it was alleged, was naturally suited

for life in a democratic republic. "Real" Americans were free of the "superstitious"

beliefs, outside loyalties, and herd mentality of "inferior" Latin and Celtic peoples. The

Anglo-Saxon categorization was perhaps more fluid than its title suggests, as it might

include whites of any national background as long as they were Protestant. The *Irish*

World, not surprisingly, had much to say on the subject. Denouncing the "Anglo-Saxon

fraud," it asked its readers to ponder the inheritance of the American: "What binds us as a

NATION," it said, "is Not community of race, But community of interests."[87] James

Jeffrey Roche, editor of the Boston *Pilot*, was another steadfast critic of Anglo-Saxon

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[82] Kennedy, "Pulpits and Politics," 59.
[83] Boston *Pilot*, 22 February 1890.
[84] Boston *Pilot*, 26 April 1890.
[85] Kennedy, "Pulpits and Politics," 67.

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theories: "This is not a white man's country, nor a black man's country, nor a yellow

man's country," he said. Nor was it "as some [pretended], an Anglo-Saxon country." The

Constitution "and its amendments," he declared, had "defined it clearly as a country of

the people, regardless of race, color, or creed."[88]

While much of the Irish-American response to Anglo Saxonism involved a

defense of the Catholic religion, the "Anglo" component of the Anglo-Saxon myth did

not escape Irish attention. From an Irish perspective, one of the most disturbing aspects

of the nativist emphasis on the America's Protestantism, was that it spurred a movement

for Anglo-American alliance. There was a good deal of overlap between nativists who

spoke of America's Anglo-Saxon heritage and those who actively lobbied for closer

diplomatic and cultural ties with the former Mother Country. The issue reached a climax

in the latter part of the 1890s, when it seemed the United States was about to formalize,

through yet another treaty, an alliance with Great Britain. This latest manifestation of

"Anglo mania" was denounced in the strongest terms across the entire spectrum of Irish-

American opinion.

The *Irish World* led the charge against the proposed alliance with America's

"hereditary and only enemy among nations."[89] In its pages, Robert Ellis Thompson

decried the "international flunkeyism" that saw Americans ashamed of their passports,

and eager to ape the latest fashions, ideas, and speech from London. He described the

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[86] Irrespective of the fact that the original Anglo Saxons were pre-Christian.

[87] *The Irish World*, 11 June 1898.

[88] Quoted in Roger Lane, "James Jeffrey Roche and the Boston *Pilot*," *New England Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1960), 348-349.

typical Anglo maniac as someone "who religiously [rolled] up his trousers when he [heard] it [was] raining in London." As far as Thompson was concerned, exposure to Britain had *already* damaged the Republic: he lamented that the "constant and unhampered contact of our national mind with that of a nation alien to us in its political ideals and its social standards has been a constant check on the independent development of American nationality."[90]

Others scoffed at the idea that Americans would ever countenance an alliance with their former imperial overlord. It seemed inconceivable that the United States would attach is fortunes to a political system that was based on denial of national self-determination. The people of the United States would not be "prepared to become re-annexed to England" when they realized it meant "aiding British Empire extension."[91] Robert Ellis Thompson warned that, "alliance and imperialism go hand in hand."[92] The wars Britain waged, according to a Chicago newspaper, were "abhorrent to the American sense of justice," and the British lack of respect for territorial rights was both "un-American and un-Christian." An alliance with Britain, the article continued, "would stain the Stars and Stripes with the murders committed under the Union Jack."[93] There could not be a greater contrast, the Irish argued, between the just and restrained foreign policies pursued by the United States, and the international lawlessness embodied by the British Empire. The great example of this contrasting behavior was America's noble and high-

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[89] *The Irish World*, 27 November 1897.
[90] *The Irish World*, 11 June 1898 and 27 November 1897.
[91] Ibid.
[92] *The Irish World*, 2 July 1898.

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minded treatment of Cuba. Even as late as the spring of 1898, the *New York Voice* could

confidently announce that, "Cuba shall not be an American possession, not an Anglo-

Saxon province, but a free land."[94]

Anticipating the significance for Ireland of an American war for Cuban liberation,

Irish-American editors eagerly drew parallels between Spain's imperial grip on Cuba and

that of the British Empire on Ireland. Articles with headers such as, "Cuba and Ireland,"

and "Cromwellian Policy in Cuba," began appearing in Irish papers.[95] Spain was cast as a

villainous imperial overlord in the tradition of Britain: "Famine in India, famine in

Ireland, famine in Cuba" one article observed.[96] The majority of Irish Americans

welcomed the American initiative to "liberate" a small island nation from imperial

tyranny. Writing in the *Irish World* in January 1897, Thompson told readers that the

United States had no choice but to aid the insurgents, for it owed "to Cuba the duties

which international law [recognized] as binding upon every people toward oppressed and

outraged neighbors."[97]

At the time, Thompson and others ridiculed the notion that the United States

might have any desire to actually annex Cuba. "The people of the United States,"

according to the Boston *Pilot*, had "none of the Englishman's greed of conquest."[98] The

paper's editor echoed this sentiment and applauded America's war to "liberate" the Cuban

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[93] The *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, 23 May 1998 quoted in *The Irish World*, 11 June 1898.
[94] The *New York Voice* quoted in *The Irish World*, 11 June 1898.
[95] Boston *Pilot*, quoted in Lane, "James Jeffrey Roche," 357.
[96] Boston *Pilot*, 12 March 1898.
[97] *The Irish World*, 9 January 1997.
[98] Boston Pilot, 29 February 1896.

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people.[99] The *Pilot* declared Americans unanimous in their hope that the government

would intervene against Spain, and it praised Senator Lodge of Massachusetts for his

"eloquent plea" on behalf of the Cuban "nationalists."[100] There was, nonetheless, residual

unease in some Irish quarters concerning the motivations lurking behind U.S. policy in

the Caribbean. The same article that applauded Senator Lodge's hawkish address

lamented that he had, in the that speech, referred to Britain as "the Protestant champion,"

and that he had recalled the valor of "English Protestant seamen" against the Spanish

Armada. The *Pilot* warned that the decision to go to war with Spain ought not be "a

Protestant or a Catholic question."[101]

Once war did break out, Dewey's spectacular victory at Manilla was cause for

celebration, as it appeared another Spanish colony was about to receive the blessing of

liberty. The *Pilot* was quick to add that the admiral's victory was not, as a rival

newspaper had declared, due to "Anglo-Saxon pluck and endurance" and nor was it "a

triumph of Protestantism over Catholicity" as a few "idiots" had claimed.[102] It was

evidence that American sailors were better trained, and nothing more. Irish-American

insecurities simmered under the surface and boiled over at any perceived slight against

Catholics. "Is there discrimination?" one headline asked in reference to rumors that the

"Irish Ninth" had been held back from the front. The *Pilot* was particularly vigilant. A

June 1898 piece highlighted a lecture entitled "Popery, the Foe of the Republic," in which

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[99] Robert Francis Walsh, *The Boston Pilot: A Newspaper for the Irish Immigrant 1829-1900* (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1975), 270.
[100] Boston *Pilot*, 29 February 1896.
[101] Ibid.

a Philadelphia Presbyterian minister had insinuated that America's true enemy was not

Spanish tyranny, but Catholic tyranny.[103]

Many Americans, not just the Irish, began to question the direction of American

foreign policy. The 1898 Treaty of Paris (ending the war with Spain) allowed for a

measure of Cuban self-government, but stipulated that Spain's other possessions (Puerto

Rico, Guam, and the Philippines) were to become annexed to the United States. Irish

leaders accused the administration of attempting to "pervert a war of humanity into a war

of conquest."[104] Despite lobbying by the Anti-Imperialist League (formed in November

1898), the Senate narrowly ratified the treaty in early 1899. Filipino nationalists, already

convinced of American intentions, had two days prior to treaty's ratification declared war

on the United States.[105]

Irish Americans suspected that sectarian considerations had played a role in the

United States government's apparent conversion to imperialism. Catholicism, they

noted, was the majority religion in the Philippines, as it had been in Cuba. Could this be

why the Filipinos were suddenly deemed "unfit for self-government," and "unprepared

for the blessings of liberty?" Catholic nations, it seemed, were more likely than others to

require salvation through annexation.[106] If a people did not "accept and adopt every

"Yankee" notion offered them," one Irish commentator observed, the United States took

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[102] Boston *Pilot*, 21 May 1898.

[103] Boston *Pilot*, 25 June 1898.

[104] William Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty: Selected Addresses* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1925), 143.

[105] Jim Zwick, "The Anti-Imperialist Movement, 1898-1921," in *Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation*, ed. Virginia M. Bouvier (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001): 171-192.

[106] Rodechko, *Patrick Ford*, 151.

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on to "govern them [itself] in the good old time-honored Anglo-Saxon way." Should the

government require any pointers, the article continued bitterly, it had only to look to

Britain's 1882 seizure of Egypt.[107] Why, other Irish Americans wondered, was Catholic

Spain's Empire deemed corrupt and tyrannical, while Protestant Britain's dominion was

apparently something to emulate?[108] Against a background of nativism, conspiracy

theories, and counter conspiracy theories, America's drift toward empire appeared another

manifestation of Anglo-Saxon triumphalism.

Irish suspicions were fed by the hawkish war coverage of some of the more

populist American newspapers (known collectively as the "Yellow Press").[109] Mr.

Dooley (satirical alter-ego of Irish-American columnist Peter Finley Dunne) mocked the

press's obsession with the heroics of their stalwart "Anglo-Saxon troops" as they put the

"effete" Spaniards and Filipinos to the sword.[110] In their enthusiasm for seizing Cuba,

several of the daily papers ran commentaries on the supposed degeneracy and barbarity

of Catholic Spain. The *Irish World* repeatedly singled out the *New York Herald* as full of

"nauseous canters" who were sickening the public with their "jackassical" talk of "racial

supremacy."[111] Ironically, some Americans who stressed the Catholicity, barbarity, and

inferiority of Filipinos made such arguments the grounds of their *opposition* to

annexation. Famed *Nation* editor E.L. Godkin was denounced as a bigot for his

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[107] Boston *Pilot*, 30 July 1898.

[108] *The Irish World*, 2 July 1898. The correspondent claimed that, "the most cruel acts of Spain toward the Cubans would be caresses of friendship compared wit the incessant barbarous fiendishness with which England has continually robbed and massacred the Irish in these seven centuries past."

[109] Lane, "James Jeffrey Roche," 357.

[110] Finley Peter Dunne, "On the Anglo-Saxon," in *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1898).

comments about "Latin Nations" being on the "downgrade." Godkin clearly linked this

decay and underlying inferiority to Catholicism; the people of the Philippines were, he

said, "the most ignorant class of peasantry bound up by the superstitions of Rome" and

they would be a burden on the United States.[112] There was thus a sectarian edge even to

some anti-imperial arguments.

Irish-Americans had initially welcomed the United States military campaign

against Spanish imperialism. Their enthusiasm dampened considerably, however, when

American policy turned toward annexation of Spain's former dependencies. The

situation was made worse, in Irish minds, by the fact that much of the debate surrounding

the Spanish-American war was couched in sectarian language. It is not surprising, in this

regard, that the Irish-American anti-imperialism in these years often centered on a

defense of Catholicism as fully compatible with democracy. In defending the right of

Cubans or Filipinos to national self-determination, Irish Americans were also defending

Ireland's viability as an independent, self-governing nation. Although statements such as

Godkin's continued to raise Catholic hackles, religious concerns would ultimately be

supplanted in the developing critique of American imperialism by other, more

fundamental questions about the direction of American society.

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[111] *The Irish World*, 1 October 1898 and 16 July 1898.
[112] Quoted in the *Irish World*, 1 October 1898.

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IV – The American Experiment in Danger

The political ramifications of American imperialism in the 1890s were perhaps even more troubling than the religious ones. The United States had been born out of a revolt against imperial tyranny, according to Irish Americans. Imperialism, in this context, was characterized as a profoundly un-American phenomenon that went against every possible reading of the principles of freedom. The "Stars and Stripes," according to Robert Ellis Thompson, "was not designed to wave over subject peoples," for it was the emblem of a nation that had, "cast off the yoke of British imperialism."[113] Irish-American Congressman William Bourke Cockran commented upon the irony that Americans "who had been the destroyers of oppression [were now] asked to become its agents ... to become the eager architects of tyranny."[114] The idea, furthermore, that the United States was about to abandon its traditional defense of the right of all people to national self-determination had profound implications for Irish nationalism. The idea that America represented Ireland's best hope (both as a model republic and a potential ally) had been a recurring theme in Irish-American political ideology. This belief, for example, underpinned Irish loyalty to the Union in the American Civil War. In explaining his decision to fight, one Irish-American soldier declared that, "America is Irland's refuge Irland's last hope destroy this republic and her hopes are blasted If Ireland

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[113] *The Irish World*, 25 June 1898.
[114] Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty*, 150.

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is ever ever [to be] free the means to acomplish it must come from the shores of America [sic]."[115]

David Doyle has argued that nineteenth-century American Catholics were "resigned to colonialism as the most likely, if undesirable, relationship between 'advanced' and 'primitive' peoples."[116] This cannot be said to be true of Irish nationalist critics of American policy toward Cuba and the Philippines. Longtime nationalist activist Patrick Egan invoked the words of Abraham Lincoln when he argued that, "the bulwark of [American] safety lies ... in the spirit which recognizes the heritage of men in all lands, everywhere." To destroy the national hopes of another people was to plant "the seed of despotism at your own doors."[117] Egan had, he said, maintained the "same old-fashioned veneration for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution" as ever, and on that basis he regarded "any piddling with Imperialism as un-republican and un-American." Every "principle upon which this Republic was founded," he said, was "being ruthlessly trampled under foot," while "the immortal Declaration of Independence" was being "scoffed at as 'antiquated'" and the great charter of [American] liberties" was "being cast aside" with claims that the United States had "outgrown" its Constitution.[118] Even the comical Mr. Dooley appeared disenchanted by America's "qualified" commitment to applying to other peoples the principles of the Declaration of

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[115] A Irish soldier in the Union Army cited in Kevin O'Neill, "The Star-spangled Shamrock: Meaning and memory in Irish America," *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian Mc Bride, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 126, 127.
[116] Doyle, *Irish Americans, Native Rights and National Empires*, 252.
[117] Patrick Egan to the *Cincinnati Enquirer* – republished in the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin) on 30 October 1899.
[118] Ibid.

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Independence.[119] In July 1898 when the Senate approved a resolution annexing the

Hawaiian islands, the Boston *Pilot* did not hide its displeasure. The circumstances of the

annexation, it said, did "not bear too close scrutiny." Declaring America "big enough,"

the paper urged the country to "stop and reckon the results" before it proceeded any

further on its self-appointed mission of civilization.[120]

Other Irish-American observers challenged the idea that Spain's former colonies

would benefit from forcible "Americanization." Patrick Collins, mayor of Boston,

declared that America had no more right "to force [its] civilization upon Cuba or Puerto

Rico or the Philippines," than England had a right "to force its civilization, its creed, or

its code upon the Irish people or the people of the Transvaal."[121] Patrick Ford ended his

paper's association with the Republican Party, accused the Government of being "high-

handed" with Spain, and denounced American "land piracy" in the Philippines.[122] The

Filipinos, he said, "had been benevolently assimilated against their will." It was

appropriate for Irish Americans to weigh-in on the question, Ford added, because what

they "claimed for themselves, they [demanded] for others likewise."[123] This theme

resonated with, among others, the Worcester, Massachusetts branch of Clan na Gael,

which issued a statement reading, "we who are banded together in a fight for Irish

freedom unqualifiably [sic] condemn any movement which has for its object the

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[119] Peter Finley Dunne, *Mr. Dooley's Opinions* (New York: R.H. Russell, 1901), "The Philippine Peace" in *Observations of Mr. Dooley* (New York: R.H. Russell, 1902).
[120] Boston *Pilot*, 16 July 1898.
[121] M.P. Curran, *Life of Patrick A. Collins With Some of His most Notable Public Addresses* (Massachusetts: Norwood Press, 1906), 152-53.
[122] *The Irish World*, 5, 19, and 26 November 1898.
[123] Quoted in Taylor, "Patrick Ford," 145.

subjugation of a people, or the attempt to deprive them of their God-given rights whether in Ireland or the Philippines."[124] John Finerty, a prominent editor and nationalist, told a Chicago audience that Irish-Americans "wanted no partnership in [the] plunder, murder, [and] debauchery" of imperialism.[125] Lamenting that the United States appeared to have "stepped into Spain's shoes," Irish-American leaders of every hue soon lost all taste for the war, and by November of 1898 the Boston *Pilot*, in a remarkable turnaround, began urging citizens not to enlist.[126]

There was, of course, a party political dimension to the debate in that imperialism was most closely associated with the Republican presidency of William McKinley. Most Irish Americans were aligned with the Democratic Party and they were therefore already primed to oppose McKinley's policies. The unanimity and vehemence with which Irish Americans responded to the advent of American imperialism suggests, however, that imperialism was anything but just another political issue. Roger Lane has argued that the *Pilot*'s editor, James Jeffrey Roche, was devastated at Irish miscalculations concerning America's distance from the "Old World" and all that it represented.[127] There had been a sense, whether it reflected reality or not, that the United States had always followed a singular and isolationist policy. William Bourke Cockran described this policy as one to "glory in" for "by strict compliance with the principles of equity, [the United States] had

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[124] Meagher, "Irish All the Time," 282-283.
[125] *The Irish World*, 4 June 1898.
[126] Walsh, *The Boston Pilot*, 271.
[127] Lane, "James Jeffrey Roche," 358-360.

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become eminent ... and eminence ... always [meant] isolation."[128] Now not only were

Americans able to contemplate entry into the potentially dangerous world of international

alliances, they were ready, and even eager, to embark on a policy of empire-building.

Apparent victories, such as the defeat of the Phelps-Rosebery treaty in the 1880s, now

appeared meaningless. Irish-American leaders seemed to have had badly misjudged the

direction of America's policy makers.

More profoundly troubling than the prospect of an Anglo-American alliance, or

even a foreign policy based on nativism, was the fear that the embrace of empire was the

first step toward dismantling the Republic itself. American actions in the Caribbean and

the Philippines marked a departure from the country's traditional policy of isolation and

from its role as a defender of the right to national self-determination. Recent foreign

policy could not, critics of imperialism insisted, be compared to America's earlier

expansion westward. Expansion was defined as the "peaceful development of [the

country's] political system through an increase in the area of the United States," while

imperialism was the "forcible exercise by [the] Government, in other countries, of powers

denied to it at home." As much as annexation would harm the Philippines, its

ramifications for the United States would be far more serious, because it "would divorce

the American flag and the American constitution by sending the one where the other

[could not] go." The result would be the militarization of American society, and

ultimately, the destruction of the Republic itself. "Imperialism and republicanism [were]

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[128] Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty*, 57.

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essentially hostile," William Bourke Cockran insisted, for, "the same government [could

not be both] autocratic and representative."[129]

In the summer of 1899, Thompson, Ford, and Bourke Cockran became Vice-

Presidents of the American Anti-Imperialist League.[130] Indeed the argument that the

Republic was being torn apart by contradiction was central to the broader American anti-

imperial critique of many influential figures associated with the League. The Boston

Pilot returned repeatedly to a lecture in which Republican Senator George F. Hoar

(Massachusetts) told his audience that there could not exist "for any long period under the

same flag, men who govern themselves and men to whom the right of self-government is

denied."[131] Insisting that "a republic cannot exist as an empire," the paper urged the

government to appreciate the lesson Napoleonic France had learned too late.[132] Patrick

Collins claimed that imperialism begged the question not what *kind* of republic

Americans would have, but "whether [they would] have a republic at all." "If," he said,

"popular sanction should be given to the undemocratic policy of seizing or purchasing

foreign territory, ruling people against their will in direct and open violation of our own

Declaration of Independence ... [then] the Republic would cease to exist as it was

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[129] Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty*, 43, 61, and 161.

[130] E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920*
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 128; Jim Zwick, "The Anti-Imperialist Movement,
1898-1921," 171-174. The American Anti-Imperialist League was formed in November 1898. A national
organization, it collected 50,000 signatures demanding the Senate refuse to ratify the Treaty of Paris (which
provided for the annexation of the Philippines). Many influential American figures (such as Mark Twain)
opposed the new expansionism of the United States.

[131] Boston *Pilot*, 27 August 1898. Hoar had opposed a bill to limit the number of Chinese immigrants into
the United States in 1882. The proposed legislation, he said, was motivated by "race prejudice." *Harper's
Weekly*, 18 March 1882. He was one of the few Republican anti-imperialists in the Senate. Hoar
demanded self-determination for both the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Thomas J. Osborne. "Hoar, George
Frisbie"; http://www.anb.org/articles/05/05-00349.html (*American National Biography Online*).

founded, and the foundation of an empire would be laid upon its ruins."[133] If things did

not change, according to Patrick Egan, the "the downfall of [the] Republic [would] date

from the McKinley administration."[134] Robert Ellis Thompson got at the heart of Irish

nationalist fears when he told his readers that "every enemy of republican government"

would delight in America's "abandoning [its] own principle to adopt the dirty rags of

monarchical imperialism."[135] He suspected, as did many Irish Americans, that Britain

would cheer loudest of all.

More than anything else, then, Irish-American anti-imperialism in the 1890s

reflected concerns that the United States had abandoned its historical role as a defender of

republicanism. The American Republic had been founded on "the principle that the only

proper basis and justification of government is the consent of the governed," and its

success had "changed the whole trend of human thought," because it had shown that "the

ideals of Washington and Jefferson were capable of application to life on the largest

scale."[136] William Bourke Cockran left no doubt as to the seriousness of the question at

hand: "To profess faith in the stability of this Republic," he said, "is to profess faith in

human progress. If this government is to abandon the traditional American policy of

peace and justice for a mediaeval policy of conquest and violence, the very existence of

Christian civilization is imperiled."[137]

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[132] Boston *Pilot*, 20 August 1898.
[133] Curran, *Life of Patrick A. Collins*, 149.
[134] Patrick Egan to the *Cincinnati Enquirer* – reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal* on 30 October 1899.
[135] *The Irish World*, 25 June 1898.
[136] Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty*, 147, 48; *The Irish World*, 25 June 1898.
[137] Bourke Cockran, *In the Name of Liberty*, 164.

Much more was at stake than the future of Cuba and the Philippines. Irish-American newspapers insisted that oppressed nations everywhere needed to be assured that the American experiment would continue to provide an alternative model of the nation. Should the United States recast itself as an empire, it would be turning its back on all those struggling nationalities that had looked to it for inspiration and assistance. Úna Ní Bhroiméil has demonstrated indeed that this notion also shaped the *Irish World's* response to Britain's war in South Africa in 1899. The paper observed that "the Boers were defending two small republics against the might of the British empire," and that, as such, a "shared republicanism" ought to move Americans to sympathize with the Boers rather than with the British. The paper subsequently denounced both the McKinley and Roosevelt administrations when they refused to formally recognize the Boer republics.[138]

Irish-American anti-imperialism in the 1890s was founded both on concerns about the position of Irish Catholics within American society and on the fears for the safety of the overall principles on which that society was based. American imperialism, heretofore an unthinkable contradiction, was seen as Anglo-Saxon triumphalism on an international scale. It was, according to its critics, a profound negation of every principle on which the United States had been established. Those fundamental principles, moreover, had been previously held to be universally applicable. The implications for Irish nationalism were serious; an imperial United States would be unlikely to be sympathetic to Ireland's cause. American imperialism undermined many of the assumptions on which Irish-American

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[138] Úna Ní Bhroiméil, "The South African War, empire and the *Irish World*, 1899-1902," in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter

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nationalists had based their political ideology. It cemented, at the same, the place of anti-imperialism in Irish nationalist discourse, both as it existed in America and in Ireland.

V – Nationalists in Ireland and American Imperialism

Nationalists in Ireland, of course, watched American developments with particular interest. Virtually every Irish leader had, at one time or another, embarked on lecturing and fund-raising tours of the United States. To a great extent, indeed, visiting nationalists on the American lecture circuit had encouraged the notion both of America's symbolic importance, and of Irish-America's custodianship of the principles upon which the United States had been founded. One of the most outspoken Irishmen in this regard was Michael Davitt, founder of the Land League and the Irish link in Patrick Ford's radical social reform movement of the early 1880s. In common with other nationalists, Davitt spent a great deal of time in the 1890s lobbying against the prospect of an Anglo-American diplomatic alliance. The 1896 Venezuelan Crisis had led to a face-off between the United States and Great Britain, but war had been averted, and the late 1890s saw renewed calls for a diplomatic alliance between the two great "Anglo-Saxon" powers.

In Ireland, Unionists were enthusiastic about the potential alliance, for it would silence those like Davitt who liked to portray the United States as at the bidding of Irish nationalism. Unionist leader Edward Saunderson argued that it would be a more natural and practical thing for Americans to identify with "Anglo-Saxon" Britain than with

(Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004): 195-216, 203.

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perennially disaffected Irish nationalists. Saunderson explained that although Britain was quite prepared to "fight her own corner alone," she at the same time "desired the peace of the world, with which the welfare of humanity and her own commercial prosperity" were bound up. In that regard, he said, there lay across the Atlantic a "great nation, speaking the same language, largely descended from the same stock" and having the very same goal. What therefore could be "more natural," he asked, than for the two to enter into an alliance "for the same great and noble ends?"[139]

This possibility horrified Irish nationalists, Michael Davitt in particular. Perhaps more than any other Irish individual of his day, he was the physical and intellectual link between nationalism in Ireland and America. He had worked tirelessly to keep Irish issues before the American public and he was immensely fond of Americans since the days when they had funded the Land League.[140] There was, consequently, no length to which he would not go to in order to keep America sympathetic to Ireland. The American government had never officially supported Irish independence, but a formal alliance with Britain would put an end to any hope that it someday might do so. An alliance, moreover, would make it more difficult for nationalist leaders to appeal to ordinary Americans for financial and moral support. Davitt feared that Irish nationalism might never recover were it to lose its American backing, and indeed, the extent to which Irish nationalists depended on the moral, as well as financial, support of Americans may be judged by their clamor against the potential alliance with Great Britain.

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[139] Edward Saunderson to *The Times*, 19 May 1898.
[140] See Davitt's correspondence to William O'Brien (May 1898): William O'Brien Papers, NLI, MS 913.

Davitt insisted that the United States stood to gain nothing from a pact with the

British Empire. He warned in an open letter to the *Irish World* that, on the contrary, a

"confederate Anglo-Saxon Empire of Great Britain and the United States" would be

"perilous" for America, as it would make the Republic the target of Britain's many

enemies.[141] The "greatest curse of the world," he said, was the "imperialism which Great

Britain [had] taught the other nations to adopt from her example." It would be a

tremendous blow to struggling nationalities everywhere if the United States was to

become Britain's latest willing accomplice. The American people, Davitt insisted, should

not be fooled by high-blown talk of spreading "civilization." He denied categorically that

"England [stood] for either liberty or humanity outside" her own shores, and he urged his

American audience not to "allow the Republic to be dragged into entangling alliances at

the bidding of European statesmen, or on the suggestion of maudling [American]

millionaires who [disliked] the country that [had] made them wealthy and who

[preferred] to live under the rule of kings than in a land of presidents."[142]

Nationalists in Ireland suspected that Britain had already succeeded in converting

the United States to imperialism. The Quaker nationalist Alfred Webb declared that there

"was something almost sickening in 'imperial' talk of assuming and bearing burdens for

the good of others." In a long letter to the *Nation* (New York) in February 1899, he gave

a point-for-point rebuttal to Rudyard Kipling's recently published poem, "The White

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[141] *The Irish World*, 11 June 1898.

[142] Michael Davitt to unknown (18 July 1898): Michael Davitt Collection, NLI, MS 2159; Michael Davitt, "Ireland's Appeal to America," *Denvir's Monthly Irish Library*, (London: No. 3, March 1902).

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Man's Burden." Kipling's verse was intended to inspire America to act as imperial

"civilizer" in the Philippine islands, newly wrested from Spain. If the United States was

to faithfully mirror the British example, Webb quipped, they would sponsor a famine

among the Filipinos as England had recently done among the Indians. He urged

Americans "not to be egged on to the relinquishment of all [their] best traditions" by

Kipling's "impudent Pharisaical rhyming." "In deliberately entering upon [the British]

course," he warned, America "would jeopardize all principles" for which it had

historically stood.[143] Arthur Griffith's United Irishman, noting America's difficulties in

subduing the Filipinos, suggested that the Republic's problems stemmed from it having

had "foolishly imbibed the 'Anglo-Saxon' doctrine of one of them being equal to ten

foreigners."[144] The usually circumspect Freeman's Journal lamented the "degeneration

of republican opinion in the United States on the Imperialism question," and declared

"the corruption of democracy by Jingoism" to be "one of the most sinister signs of the

day."[145]

Irish nationalists often alluded to what they claimed was America's role as the

standard bearer for national self-determination. Noting the "importance which has been

universally attached on all sides to American opinion," Charles Stewart Parnell urged

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Republished in Michael Davitt, Pamphlets, Speeches and Articles, 1889-1906, ed. Carla King (Bristol: Thoemmes Press and Edition Synapse, 2001), 16.

[143] Alfred Webb, "Mr. Kipling's Call to America," The Nation 68 (Feb. 23, 1899). http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/webb.html In Jim Zwick, ed., Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898-1935. http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/ (June. 3, 2004).

[144] The United Irishman, 29 April 1899.

[145] The Freeman's Journal, 30 October 1899.

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American congressmen to publicly record their support for Irish nationalism. He told the

House of Representatives that it would be

> a proud boast for America if, after having obtained, secured, and ratified her own
> freedom by sacrifices unexampled in the history of any nation, she were now, by
> force of her public opinion alone, by the respect with which all countries look
> upon any sentiment prevailing here, if she were now to obtain for Ireland, without
> the shedding of one drop of blood, without drawing the sword, without one
> threatening message, the solution of this great question.[146]

Michael Davitt urged Irish Americans to protect the institutions – the Constitution in

particular – on which the United States' special status rested. Given, he said, their "great

moral power in the world of progressive thought and action ... the mission and the

privilege of citizens of Irish birth and blood in [the] Republic," was to "stand first and

foremost as the loyal guardians of the letter and of the spirit of that greatest of political

documents in the world's history – on which this Republic remains indestructible while it

stands on that foundation."[147]

The depiction of the Irish as guardians of America's republican heritage was a

popular theme in nationalist discourse at the time. Maud Gonne, who would play such a

visible part in the protests against the South African War, told an 1894 Irish-American

audience that "God in His justice had given those who had been driven out homeless

from Ireland ... the task of protecting America, the country of their adoption, from being

ever lured into an alliance with the British Empire, the destroyer of nationalities, the

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[146] Congressional Record X, p. 1 (2 Feb 1880), 664-665. Cited in Alan O'Day, "Media and Power: Charles Stewart Parnell's 1880 Mission to North America," in *Information, Media and Power through the Ages*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: UCD Press, 2001), 216-217.
[147] Michael Davitt, "Ireland's Appeal to America," 16.

enemy of human freedom."[148] An 1898 *Shan Van Vocht* editorial entitled "The Duty of

Irishmen in America" warned that the faith which Irishmen had in the United States

would be "shattered" by an American alliance with Britain, and that the Irish respect for

the Republic would be turned to "bitter wrath." Irish Americans, the paper said, needed

to make clear that, although they had a long tradition of defending America, they would

not support the United States in a policy that was certain to harm Ireland.[149]

Initially, however, many nationalists in Ireland, like their American counterparts,

had welcomed the news that America intended to "liberate" the island of Cuba from

Spanish imperial tyranny. Davitt heralded the war as one for "humanitarian [rather than]

for aggrandizing aims."[150] He was appalled that anyone claiming to be an Irish

nationalist would publicly support an enemy of the United States, and he told William

O'Brien that reports of "pro-Spanish feeling in Ireland ... almost [took his] breath

away."[151] But not all nationalists shared Davitt's love of America and his belief in its

exceptionalism. Irish MP Frank Hugh O'Donnell portrayed Spain as the traditional ally

of Ireland, and he declared the war an anti-Catholic crusade by the "Anglo-Yankee

clique."[152] Meanwhile from the left, James Connolly refused to distinguish between

British imperialism and what he believed to be the American variety of the same.[153] Irish

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[148] Maud Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne, A Servant of the Queen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 232.
[149] *The Shan Van Vocht*, 2 August 1898.
[150] Michael Davitt to *The Times*, 18 May 1898.
[151] Michael Davitt to William O'Brien, 27 May 1899
[152] *The Shan Van Vocht*, 1 August 1898.
[153] *The Worker's Republic*, 5 May 1899, 1 July 1899, and 9 December 1899.

newspapers too were divided, with the *Independent* siding with the American "liberators" while the *Freeman's Journal* defended Catholic Spain.[154]

Irish journals gave relatively little attention to America's war with Spain in comparison to the blanket coverage they provided of the South African War. Nationalist observers recognized, nonetheless, that the same question lay at the heart of both conflicts. The *Freeman's Journal* found it "gratifying" that Irish Americans had registered their strong opposition to American imperialism, thereby demonstrating their commitment to fighting "the same old battle for human freedom ... that Ireland fights here."[155] And while Michael Davitt accused the American government of ignoring British atrocities in South Africa, he believed Irish Americans to be keenly interested in the cause of the Boers.[156] Anti-imperialism was an important discursive thread within Irish nationalism in both Ireland and the United States during the 1890s.

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Anti-imperialism was a persistent theme within the Irish-American nationalist discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it contributed to the coherency of the broader Irish nationalist critique of empire. Irish-American anti-imperialism was

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[154] Patrick Maume, "The *Irish Independent* and Empire, 1891-1919," in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 126-27.

[155] *The Freeman's Journal*, 30 October 1899.

[156] Michael Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom*, (Bristol: Thoemmes Press and Edition Synapse, 2001), 594; Michael Davitt to William O'Brien, 17 January and 26 January 1900 and 12 February 1901. William O'Brien Papers, NLI, MS 913. He told O'Brien that the more strident the Irish Party opposition to the war, the greater its fund-raising potential in the United States.

both an expression of Irish nationalism and a reflection of specific Irish-American

religious, economic, and political concerns. The particular contours of Irish-American

political ideology reflect the Irish immigrant's shifting identity, whether working-class

(in the 1870s and 1880s), nationalist, Catholic, or republican patriot. Different facets of

that identity were prioritized in the two periods surveyed in this study. In the 1880s,

Irish-American nationalists framed their rejection of imperialism in the language of

radical social reform. They argued that the same class in society benefited from the

exploitation of labor in America as benefited from the exploitation of Ireland, and that the

war against imperialism was, therefore, as much in the interest of American worker as it

was the Irish peasant. In the 1890s, however, when the United States itself adopted

imperial policies, Irish Americans opposed empire based on what they said was its

sectarian ideological agenda (based on notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority). Their

rejection of empire in this period also hinged on the belief that imperialism contradicted

the founding principles of the United States. This had negative implications both for

Americans and for Irish nationalists. If, as John Belchem has argued, Irish Americans

expressed their nationalism in the republican idiom of the indigenous political culture, the

very foundation of their nationalism would be seriously undermined if that political

culture wavered in its commitment to republicanism and to the principle of national self-

determination.[157]

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[157] John Belchem, "Nationalism, Republicanism and Exile: 103-135.

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Chapter III

Nationalist Anti-Imperialism in Ireland, 1870-1899

Most histories of late nineteenth-century Ireland note the broad-based Irish

nationalist support for the Boers during the South African War of 1899 to 1902. In

Ireland, opponents of British imperialism quickly recognized the conflict as a crucial test

for the Empire, as well as for Irish nationalism. Seemingly overnight, "moderate Irish

opinion [was cast] into an anti-imperial mould."[1] While Irish opinion was certainly

galvanized by the war, anti-imperialism had, in fact, been a persistent theme within the

Irish nationalist discourse for almost sixty years prior to the war's outbreak. Thomas

Davis and John Mitchel had, in the 1840s and 1850s, established an anti-imperial lexicon

adapted to the needs of Irish nationalists. In addition, Irish-American nationalist

discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century had a strong anti-imperial

undercurrent. Arguably, of course, neither the Young Irelanders nor Irish-American

nationalists were necessarily representative of "moderate Irish opinion," at least, in the

context of nationalism as a whole. As this chapter demonstrates, however, moderate

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[1] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 433.

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nationalists in Ireland had their own considerable tradition of anti-imperialism going back to well before the South African War in 1899.

Parliamentary nationalism was by far the most dominant force in Irish politics in this period, but it did not represent all nationalists. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was a secret, pledge-bound organization founded in 1858 by James Stephens and John O'Mahony. Also known as the Fenians, the group was dedicated to the revolutionary overthrow of British rule and the establishment of an Irish republic. The IRB made several failed attempts at insurrection (most notably in 1867). Much of Fenianism's appeal lay in its unambiguous separatism. It was on this basis that the organization rejected Home Rule as an acceptable solution to the Irish Question.[2] Although there was little official Fenian activity in Ireland during the period, most advanced Irish nationalists in the 1880s and 1890s were sworn into the IRB as a matter of course. Fenianism continued to carry political weight for successive generations of nationalists, and many individual Fenians, such as John O'Leary, Michael Davitt, and Arthur Griffith, became active anti-imperialists in the 1890s. At an organizational level, however, Fenian separatism was implicitly rather than explicitly anti-imperial, and the IRB did not contribute much directly to the Irish discourse on empire until into the twentieth century. One of the ironies of late nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, then, is that the language of anti-imperialism was initially far more pronounced among (ostensibly) moderate parliamentarians than among separatists.

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[2] Although the IRB in 1879 briefly endorsed the New Departure, in which aggressive parliamentary action was combined with a policy of land agitation.

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Beginning in the late 1870s, a small group of Irish MPs broke ranks with the party leadership and made a critique of empire central to their more aggressive policy at Westminster. The radicals eventually took control of the Home Rule movement and made it the dominant player on the nationalist political scene. The eighty or so Irish nationalist MPs represented the balance of power in the British parliament and, in theory at least, the Irish were in a position to force concessions from both the main political parties at Westminster. In practice, however, the Tories were generally unwilling to contemplate substantive alterations to Ireland's constitutional status, and the Irish Party was, formally or informally, most often allied with the Liberals. The Irish Party depicted itself as a defender of nationality, although critically, its concept of nationality was fully compatible with continued Irish membership in the British Empire. Home Rulers sought to halt British expansion and promote imperial reform, rather than to dismantle the entire imperial project. Nationalist MPs were not necessarily opposed to all of the principles behind British imperialism, and neither did they deny that British political and economic institutions were worthy of export.

The Irish Party's criticism of empire in the 1880s, in contrast to that of later anti-imperialists, was not particularly radical. It would be a mistake to overlook its significance, however. Although the Home Rule critique of imperialism had many ideological similarities to that put forward by Liberal and Radical MPs, the Irish outspokenness on imperial questions represented a break in precedent; prior to 1877, Irish parliamentarians had tacitly agreed not to interfere in imperial business. Irish MPs in the 1880s, however, explicitly cast themselves as the voice of the imperial periphery, as the

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voice of the colonized. Their anti-imperialism, as a result, was imbued with implications

not present in the Liberal Party's critique of empire. It is not surprising, given the Irish

Party's dominance of politics in Ireland, that its focus on the imperial angle was soon

reflected in the broader nationalist discourse. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, the

Irish Party's engagement with empire strongly influenced the political coverage of Irish

newspapers in the period. This, in itself, was a significant development in regard to the

evolution of political discourse on empire. In addition, Michael Davitt injected a more

radical tone into Irish anti-imperial discourse when he linked the reform of the British

Empire to the question of social reform within Britain itself. Imperialism as it existed, he

argued, was run for the sole benefit of the British landed aristocracy. Democratic reform

within British society, he believed, would result in a more rational imperial system based

on cooperation and mutual benefit rather than exploitation.

Is it accurate, nonetheless, to speak of the mainstream nationalist movement in the

1880 and 1890s, centered as it was on the imperial parliament, as anti-imperial in any

meaningful sense? The answer to this question has typically been no: Irish MPs'

criticism of the British Empire, when acknowledged by historians, is usually explained as

political opportunism or rhetorical flourish.[3] Anti-imperialism, in other words, is

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[3] John Crangle, "The British Peace movement and the Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882,"*Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* 15, no. 3 (1975-76): 146; Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 44-46; 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 Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 113; Alan O'Day, *The English Face of Irish Nationalism: Parnellite Involvement in British Politics 1880-1886* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1977), 163-4. In contrast, the following authors argue that the Empire was an important consideration for nationalist leaders: Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 83; Deirdre McMahon, "Ireland, the Empire, and the

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classified as political strategy rather than as a significant strand of mainstream nationalist political ideology. This conclusion at first seems unavoidable, given the apparent inconsistencies in the Irish Party's position on empire. For example, although many Home Rulers (in common with many Liberals and Radicals) frequently denounced Britain's treatment of colonial peoples as underhanded, short-sighted, and cruel, they were not necessarily opposed to the idea of a "civilizing" empire, and neither were they blind to the benefits which imperial membership might offer to Ireland. Some historians too have expressed skepticism about the anti-imperial credentials of individual nationalists (and by inference, the entire nationalist movement) based on questions as to how altruistic, humanitarian, or cosmopolitan that individual's personal beliefs actually were.[4]

Given the nature of nationalism, it should not be surprising that Irish political figures used imperial disputes "mostly if not entirely to draw comparisons with and attention to *Ireland's* grievances."[5] Neither, in a historical sense, is it remarkable that, even as Irish nationalists promoted India or Egypt's right to self-rule, most of them held typically nineteenth-century racial biases. The object of this study is not to establish the extent to which Parnell and his associates personally detested imperialism, but rather to determine the contours of the Parnellite engagement with empire and the extent to which

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Commonwealth," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 188.

[4] Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 46.

[5] Ibid.

it contributed to the anti-imperial discourse within Irish nationalism.[6] Any examination of nationalist political ideology in these crucial years must take seriously Irish attitudes toward empire. Parnell's party explicitly categorized itself as the voice of the imperial periphery and as the chief Westminster critic of imperial policy. The Irish Party's stance was a considered and deliberate ideological position as well as a strategically more aggressive form of nationalist agitation.

For a small but increasingly vociferous element within Irish nationalism, the Irish Party's more radical anti-imperialism did not go far enough, however. Irish MPs in the 1890s soon found that mere condemnation of a particularly egregious piece of imperial policy in India was not sufficient to quiet the challenge from advanced nationalists. Such individuals demanded more than *ad hoc* criticism of imperial maladministration, and they questioned whether fuller extension to Ireland of liberal institutions and liberal values would represent a victory for Irish nationalism. In the period immediately preceding the Second South African War, some Irish nationalists rediscovered John Mitchel's radical economic critique of imperialism and his hostility toward British economic liberalism in general. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Irish Party stood accused of failing to live up to the implications of the anti-imperial discourse it had so carefully fostered only two decades earlier. Before understanding how anti-imperialism became a force for change within nationalism itself, however, it is necessary to first establish how it came to occupy so central a place within nationalist discourse in the 1870s and 1880s.

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[6] Howard Brasted has argued that, "there has been very little investigation of nationalist ideas and their influence, particularly in the time of Butt and Parnell." Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 83.

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I – Isaac Butt, Parnell, and the Empire

Although the roots of modern Irish anti-imperialism go back to Young Ireland, mainstream nationalist politics really only began to reflect that discourse in the late 1870s in the context both of changes within the Irish nationalist movement and a decade of expansion and crisis for the British Empire. The Land War (1879-1882) usually assumes pride of place in the traditional historical narrative of this period, but in an imperial context, it was merely one of a series of significant events in the early 1880s. As contemporary parliamentary debates and Irish newspaper coverage indicates, nationalists across the political spectrum quickly became aware that, at some level, all politics was imperial.

In the 1870s, Irish nationalist life was dominated not by Parnell, but by the Home Rule League, a loosely formed political organization founded in 1873 and centered on the efforts of the Irish in Westminster. The early Home Rulers were led by Sir Isaac Butt, a barrister who had risen to prominence some twenty-five years earlier as the legal counsel for several Young Irelanders, on trial for their role in the stillborn rebellion of 1848. He had also played a key part in the 1860s amnesty campaign on behalf of Fenian prisoners in British custody. Despite these indirect links to more radical nationalists, the Home Rule League charted a strictly constitutional approach to the Irish Question, and in its attitude to the Empire there is no evidence of any separatist impulse. In fact quite the opposite was true. Butt's attitude in Westminster was respectful, bordering on reverential, and he "was too much of an imperialist and too much of a gentleman to

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regard Britain's difficulties as anything other than Ireland's difficulties."[7] His goal was

the reinstatement of an autonomous Dublin parliament, something he believed

compatible with membership in the Empire. In this respect, Butt's Home Rule movement

was a successor of Repeal, albeit without the powerful grassroots political machine and

the organizational discipline of O'Connell's 1840s movement. Butt was a federalist and

he envisaged the empire as a commonwealth of Home Rule nations, wherein each

component people might both bear their share of imperial burdens and reap their share of

imperial rewards. As David Fitzpatrick has observed, the empire "in its more benign

aspect, evolving towards a Commonwealth, [offered many nationalists] the prospect of an

acceptable condition of self-government sheltered by Britannia's protective shield."[8]

Despite its measured tone, ecumenical outreach, and relatively modest goals,

Butt's federal conception of Home Rule faced predictable opposition from Unionists who

saw it as an essentially separatist initiative with Irish independence its ultimate aim. Butt

insisted that Home Rule was to be a unique arrangement between Ireland and Britain and

that, as such, it would have no bearing on wider imperial questions.[9] Unionists, however,

declared Irish nationalism – even the Buttite variety - incompatible with British

imperialism. Home Rule's critics argued that the granting of a separate Dublin

parliament would in itself represent a fatal blow to the British Empire. In withdrawing

from Westminster, the argument went, the Irish would weaken the constitutional basis for

the United Kingdom, and by extension, would undermine the Empire itself. Lord

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[7] Alvin Jackson, *Ireland*, 110-112.
[8] Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 506.
[9] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 85.

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Salisbury's 1883 article "Disintegration" (in which he detailed his domino theory of imperial collapse) is the best-known exposition of this anti-Home Rule argument, although it merely re-stated a theory that had been around for some years.[10] It would only be a matter of time, Conservatives argued, before a Dublin parliament objected to a piece of imperial legislation and in so doing, precipitated an imperial crisis and, ultimately, war.

Butt's imperial conception of Home Rule also faced opposition, again somewhat predictably, from radical nationalists who rejected a political program where continued imperial membership was not only accepted but, embraced. The Irish people, these radicals claimed, sought to sever completely the imperial link and were not interested in the burden, glory, or spoils of empire. Patrick Ford, in 1875, wrote to Butt to express his objection "to the principles on which the Home rule movement itself [was] founded." Ireland, Ford said, "could never rise to the true dignity of her nationhood by means of the proposed federal arrangement, and ... the Irish people, however much disposed to cheer Home Rule [in 1875] would ultimately be dissatisfied with the arrangement."[11] Likewise, Michael Davitt roundly condemned those who had "given the impression abroad that all that Ireland wanted was a fair federal union with the British Empire ... a thing that Irish people [would] never willingly consent to." John Devoy seconded this: telling the same

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[10] Lord Salisbury (Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil), "Disintegration," *Quarterly Review*, CLVI (July-October, 1883).
[11] Patrick Ford to Isaac Butt (6th January 1875), Isaac Butt Papers, NLI: MS 10415 (5).

audience that no Irishman would accept the "bastard federal connexion proposed by Isaac Butt."[12]

As though this kind of bilateral opposition were not enough, Butt also faced growing discontent from within the ranks of his own movement. He was in his mid-sixties by 1877 and his leadership seemed to younger MPs to be an impediment to the Home Rule campaign. Aspects of his character that had once seemed evidence of high-mindedness and professionalism now began to appear as liabilities: his respect for parliamentary decorum looked more like excessive deference to British opinion, his patience more like fatalistic acceptance of the *status quo*, and his *laissez-faire* attitude to the ill-discipline of Irish MPs more like ineffectual leadership. As early as 1870, even Butt's long-time ally Alfred Webb had expressed frustration at the lack of urgency in the movement (known at the time as the Home Government Association). "Are we not too standstill?" he asked. "Ought we not to be getting up meetings in the country ... ought we not to be getting subscriptions?"[13] By the late 1870s Webb contemplated abandoning political activism altogether as he had become completely disillusioned with Butt's "moribund agitation."[14] In Westminster itself, younger MPs like Joseph Biggar (Cavan) and Charles Stewart Parnell (Meath) saw themselves as professional politicians and began to resent the complacent attitude and lackluster attendance record of their colleagues. Parnell, in particular, became openly critical of Butt's leadership: "At no

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[12] *A Verbatim Copy of the Parnell Commission Report with Complete Index and Notes* (London: Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, 1890), 21.
[13] Alfred Webb to A.N. Sullivan (19 September, 1870), Alfred Webb Papers, NLI: MS 1745-7 (28).
[14] Alfred Webb, *The Autobiography of a Quaker Nationalist*, ed. Marie-Louise Legg (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 45.

time," he said, had Butt "shown that [he] had any policy at all, much less that [he] was carrying it out boldly or actively." He would, he said, have been "only too pleased to follow" Butt's lead had it been "in anything but inactivity and absence from the House."[15] In defiance of the leader, Parnell and a handful of others undertook a more actively confrontational and obstructionist approach to Commons debates.

Initially composed of no more than a handful of individuals, Parnell's radical wing quickly attracted both attention and adherents. Nationalists back in Ireland were revitalized, and echoing Parnell, the *Nation* declared that "the success of the [the] national movement" now depended on getting Ireland's "do-nothing representatives ... to waken up, come to the front, and do their duty."[16] The notion that their MPs were undertaking a "militant obstruction," as Michael Davitt later observed, was also "pleasing to the Irish imagination."[17] One of the earliest and, in many ways, most dramatic instances of Irish obstruction occurred at the end of July 1877. Amid shouting and abuse from the rest of the Commons, Parnell's small band led a filibuster in opposition to the South Africa Bill, a piece of legislation providing for the annexation of the Transvaal. Their actions kept the House sitting for forty-five straight hours, much to the disgust of Isaac Butt, who "appeared briefly in the middle of the night while the filibuster was in full spate ... remonstrated with the obstructors, and then vanished again, an impotent

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[15] Charles Stewart Parnell to Isaac Butt (24 May, 1877), published in *The Nation*, 2 June 1877 and cited in FSL Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 62.
[16] *The Nation*, 25 August 1877.
[17] Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: the Story of the Land League Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers publishers, 1904), 90.

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shadow of his former self."[18] Rapidly evaporating after August 1877, Butt's support

totally collapsed a year later in the wake of his whole-hearted endorsement of the

government's policy on the Eastern Question.[19] Accused of supporting Turkish

despotism and British imperial aggression, he found himself politically isolated. By the

time he died in May 1879, the founder of the Home Rule movement was no longer a

force in Irish politics.

In one rather critical sense, the circumstances of Butt's fall from grace provide

insight into the changing direction of Irish nationalism at Westminster in the early 1880s.

Generally speaking, Parnell's concept of Home Rule differed little in substance from

Butt's federal proposal. The difference between the two approaches was primarily one of

tone, and in this regard the Parnellites were stridently anti-imperial. The South Africa

Bill filibuster had been a defining moment for the Irish, who could not but note that much

of the British anger they provoked sprang from indignation that the Irish had broken with

precedent and used their position to interfere in imperial matters. *The Times* burned at

the injustice of it all and wondered at the state of the world when "the most insignificant

creatures [could] paralyze the whole efforts of the highest organization."[20] Parnell had

deliberately chosen a defiant tone and made clear his intentions. There had been, he said

"an unwritten law, hitherto acquiesced in by the Irish members, that no Irish may

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[18] Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 65 [sic].

[19] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 87. Butt supported Britain's backing of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, a move designed to thwart Russia's Balkan ambitions. Critics (including Gladstone) called attention to the alleged brutality with which the Turks put down proto-nationalist movements within their territories.

[20] *The Times*, 2 August 1877. The editorial continued that the impertinent Irish MPs would have to "be got rid of by some means," although not presumably through the granting of Home Rule.

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interfere in English and imperial concerns." There is defiance and the promise of more to come in his follow-up boast: "I have transgressed this law."[21] Even if many of the Irish, including Parnell, had no intention of smashing the empire in the vein of John Mitchel, they clearly found unpalatable Butt's unquestioning and obsequious support of imperial policy. While they were willing to accept continued imperial membership, it was not going to be as a silent partner. That a last display of loyalty to the Empire proved to be Butt's final undoing is significant in the sense that, "for the first time in the history of the Home Rule movement, Irish nationalism was determined on the basis of imperial attitudes," and "on this criterion, Butt and his fellow conservatives had failed the acid test."[22]

II – Parnellism and the Empire

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Parnell's party made an aggressive critique of imperialism central to their policy. Their attitude represented a dramatic change of tone from that of earlier nationalist MPs and it reflected Irish reservations about the imperial project and the nature of imperialism itself. For the Parnellites, an added attraction in anti-imperialism was that it allowed them to make a clear break from Butt while providing scores of issues on which they could speak passionately and convincingly. Of course, Irish MPs were sometimes poorly informed on imperial matters and there were, in

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[21] Charles Stewart Parnell to *The Times* (London), reproduced in *The Nation* (11 August 1877) and cited in Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 66. Felix Larkin appears to misinterpret Parnell's comment when he uses it to imply that the obstructionists intended to steer clear of imperial issues. See Larkin, "The dog in the night-time," 113.

[22] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 87.

addition, many factual and theoretical inconsistencies in some of their arguments. Their criticism of imperial policy, moreover, was somewhat lacking in originality: it was nothing that Radicals and even some Liberals had not said before.[23] That it meant something quite different coming from an Irish Member is very clear, however, and any of the valid criticisms that may be made of the Irish arguments should not obscure the real significance of the Parnellite engagement with imperial questions: it reoriented mainstream Irish nationalist discourse away from any drift toward the metropolitan perspective.

The change of tone from Butt's more conciliatory attitude to empire was also founded on several pragmatic considerations. First, the argument that the Irish would win British confidence by keeping out of imperial business at Westminster had produced few dividends. Irish bills in Butt's time often either never made it to a vote or were unceremoniously defeated. There was thus something to the Parnellite argument that Ireland's fortunes in Westminster had nowhere to go but up. The militant posture and anti-imperial rhetoric also served another purpose. Parnell had for some time been developing contacts with radical nationalists both in Ireland and the United States.[24] Despite the fact that the Parnell version of Home Rule did not differ substantially from Butt's federal proposal, many radical nationalists (including many Fenians) endorsed it,

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[23] John Crangle, "Irish Nationalist Criticism of the Imperial Administration of India 1880-84," *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* 40, no. 4 (1971/72): 189-194. Irish MPs frequently reminded Gladstone and John Bright of their past anti-imperial sentiment and support for the principle of nationalism.
[24] Jackson, *Ireland*, 113.

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at least temporarily.[25] The crucial consideration in this decision was that Parnell

marketed Home Rule as the reluctant acceptance of continued imperial membership.

Butt, in contrast, had promoted his policy on the basis that it would strengthen the

imperial connection. If that seems like a fine distinction, it was nonetheless a critical one

for advanced nationalists. It was a distinction that allowed for a limited, but potentially

significant common discourse between constitutionalism and separatism, a discourse

founded on a shared understanding of the Irish question as an imperial question.

Although Parnell fully underwrote the party's obstruction of imperial business, he

himself played a relatively small role in the campaign. The party's primary goal

remained Home Rule for Ireland, and as the leader, Parnell understandably used his

parliamentary time to address specifically Irish questions. When he did speak on

imperial issues, he made clear on which side he stood, as at the time of the First South

African War when he told the Commons that "as an Irishman," his "strong sympathy lay

with the "gallant" Boers who, like the Irish, were "struggling for their independence."[26]

On another occasion he declared that "as an Irishman, coming from a country that had

experienced to its fullest extent the results of English interference in its affairs and the

consequences of English cruelty and tyranny, he felt a special satisfaction in preventing

and thwarting the intentions of the government in respect" of the its attempt to annex the

Transvaal.[27] Parnell also took a keen interest in his colleagues' efforts to raise awareness

about Indian questions. It seemed quite likely, for example, that he would agree to the

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[25] Michael Davitt and, in the United States, John Devoy and Patrick Ford.
[26] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 259, cc. 1554-1555, 21 March 1881.
[27] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 235, c. 1809, 25 July 1877.

proposal to set aside one of the Irish seats for the Indian nationalist Dadabhai Naoroji. In

this way, India would have at least token representation in the imperial parliament.

According to Davitt, Parnell "liked the plan very much," though he declined to go

forward with it believing as he did that it would be difficult to convince an Irish

constituency to forgo representation in order to provide a guaranteed seat to Naoroji.[28]

Even his more high-minded colleagues seem to have accepted his assessment that the

plan would have been impractical to implement.

In his tacit acceptance of their attacks on British imperial policy, Parnell also

accepted that he would constantly be called upon to defend Home Rule against charges of

separatism. These charges were particularly difficult to countermand when it was his

own statements he had to explain: he reportedly told a Cincinnati Ohio audience that no

Irish nationalist, including he himself, would be "satisfied until [they had] destroyed the

last link which [kept] Ireland bound to England."[29] Parnell claimed to have been

misquoted and indeed, at no other point did he express any wish to leave the Empire

altogether. Like the majority of his colleagues, he was critical of the methods whereby

Britain had acquired an empire, but he clearly considered the Empire's existence as a *fait*

accompli, and even as an inevitable corollary of Britain's standing as a wealthy,

industrialized, and powerful nation.

It would be Frank Hugh O'Donnell rather than Parnell who became the party's

most persistent and outspoken commentator on imperial matters. First elected to

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[28] Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 447.

[29] Alan O'Day, "Media and Power: Charles Stewart Parnell's 1880 Mission to North America," in
Information, Media and Power through the Ages, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: UCD Press, 2001), 211-212.

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Westminster in 1874, he was briefly without a seat, before returning in 1877 in time to

become one of Parnell's key allies in the obstruction campaign.[30] A fluent, animated

speaker, O'Donnell was also an "egomaniac of a particularly virulent kind," and not at all

inclined to take dictation from those he considered his intellectual inferiors.[31] Piqued by

the relatively small place given him in other accounts of Parnellism, he used his two-

volume history of the parliamentary party to take credit for everything from the idea of

obstruction to the foundation of modern Indian nationalism.[32] Although his version of

events must thus be treated with a degree of skepticism, even Davitt, his sometime

nemesis, acknowledged O'Donnell as the primary architect and chief instrument of the

Irish party's policy on empire.[33] The basis of that policy was to be that, given both its

access to Westminster and the Irish experience of imperialism, the party had an implicit

duty to act as parliamentary advocate for all those disenfranchised and displaced by the

British Empire, be they in Ireland, India, or in Egypt. In doing so the Irish Members

would demonstrate not only that nationality was as "sacred in Asia and Africa as in

Ireland," but "that the children of a subject race, of a suppressed nationality, could

intervene without reverence in the very arcana and central organization of Empire."[34]

Another Irish MP told the Commons that MPs of "the nationality to which he belonged

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[30] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 91; Mary Cumpston, "Some Early Indian Nationalists and their Allies in the British Parliament 1851-1906", *English Historical Review* 76, no. 299 (1961): 279-297. Parnell declined to endorse O'Donnell's continued inclusion on the party ticket in 1885. The rift between the men stemmed in large part from O'Donnell's resentment at Parnell's autocratic leadership style as well as at the cult of celebrity surrounding "the Chief."
[31] Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 62; Jackson, *Ireland*, 110; T.W Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution 1846-82* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981), 512-513.
[32] O'Donnell, *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, vol. I, 172-174; vol. II, 423-445.
[33] Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 109.
[34] O'Donnell, *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party* vol. 1, 186-187, 214.

would be wanting in their duty if they did not [protest] against the policy of the

Government [in Egypt] ... outraging as it did the principle of nationality."[35] In thus

casting the Irish as merely one struggling nationality among many other victims of

imperialism, the Parnellites' approach was a direct challenge to the Buttite position that

"British misrule in Ireland was a unique phenomenon requiring a unique solution."[36]

Generally speaking, O'Donnell's own intervention on imperial questions fell into

two categories. Most often, he used his position to highlight the dishonorable and

immoral manner in which Britain had acquired and administered its Empire. In dealing

with South Africa, for example, British policy had been "haphazard" and one of

"systematic bad faith" in relation to both the Boers and the various native populations.

He accused the government of "political casuistry" in pursuing a "policy of self

aggrandizement" so lacking in any ethical consideration as to "bring a blush of shame to

the cheek of any man with a spark of humanity."[37] O'Donnell was especially critical of

the behavior of Sir Bartle Frere, Britain's Governor in the Cape Colony. Given the task

of facilitating the federation of the South African colonies, Frere instead provoked a

bloody war with the Zulus in 1879. To O'Donnell, he was the classic imperial buccaneer,

representing all that was odious, slapdash, and disreputable about British imperialism as

it stood. Frere's actions, he told the Commons, revealed the British policy in South

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[35] T.P. O'Connor in Hansard, Third Series, vol. 276, cc. 210-211, 16 Feb 1883.

[36] Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," 92.

[37] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 236, cc. 560-563, 7 August 1877; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 243, cc. 2034-2035, 27 February 1879.

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Africa to be one of "exaggerated and unscrupulous imperialism," and gratuitous "land speculation."[38]

A second theme of O'Donnell's was that the British government had failed in its duty toward Africa's native population. As things stood, he said, the British were happy to arm the natives when it suited their purposes and to subsequently pursue a policy of "inhuman butchery" of those same people when they became an inconvenience.[39] It was time, he said, for Her Majesty's Government to embrace the role of "independent and loyal protector of the Native races." Regardless "of what might be said of the stolidity and intellectual darkness of a savage race," O'Donnell said, the British would stand condemned in the eyes of the world should they "fail to discharge the great responsibilities" incumbent upon them. Far from demanding British withdrawal from South Africa, then, O'Donnell called upon the government to assert their presence there in order to "fairly and honestly [take] up the defence of the Natives," many of whom "were eminently susceptible to civilization," and greatly "in need of better buildings, better food, and clothing."[40]

Obviously offensive and patronizing by today's standards, O'Donnell's comments reflect his belief that the Irish MPs were naturally positioned to prescribe solutions to imperial problems. He was not completely insensitive to the racial hypocrisy inherent in imperial attitudes. When, for example, another MP asked the Under Secretary for India

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[38] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 267, cc. 815-818, 13 March 1882.
[39] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 243, cc. 2034-2035, 27 February 1879.
[40] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 267, cc. 815-818, 13 March 1882; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 243, cc. 2034-2035, 27 February 1879.

about "reported outrages on English ladies" by Indian men, O'Donnell asked "whilst he [was] on the subject, could not the Hon. Gentleman obtain a statement of the annual number of outrages on English women by Englishmen?"[41] To dismiss interventions such as this as mere grandstanding is to ignore the broader implications of O'Donnell's reasoning. If British imperialism was not going to carry the banner of civilization, either because it would not or could not, then what was the justification for the Empire? This question, not addressed directly at the time, would surface repeatedly in subsequent nationalist discourse on empire.

While the First South African War and the Zulu War provoked O'Donnell's ire, it was British policy in Egypt that brought his party colleagues out in force. Egypt, although technically an outpost of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, had succeeded by the mid-nineteenth century, in winning a measure of autonomy. In their effort to distance themselves from Constantinople, however, successive Egyptian leaders had become financially dependent on European investors (largely French and British). In 1876, however, the Khedive Ismail declared bankruptcy and Egyptian finances were effectively placed under the control of dual British/French administrators. Ismail, although kept in place, was reduced to a figurehead. This fragile arrangement collapsed in 1879. After much scheming, the Europeans succeeded in having Ismail deposed in favor of his son Tewfik. The new Khedive proved highly unpopular, and in 1881 a military rebellion broke out under the auspices of a nationalist uprising against Ottoman rule. The British,

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[41] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 282, cc. 939-940, 30 July 1883.

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under heavy pressure from worried financiers, intervened first by bombarding the city of Alexandria in July 1882 and later, by the *de facto* occupation of the rest of the country.[42]

Irish MPs denounced the campaign against the Egyptian nationalists in the strongest possible terms. As with O'Donnell's criticism of British policy in South Africa, much of the Irish condemnation of events in Egypt focused on the dishonorable and underhanded manner in which the British had allegedly acted. John O'Connor Power set the tone of the Irish response when he asked whether anyone would "point to the late Expedition to Egypt as an incident in the history of this Empire by which England had set any high example to the world?" He demanded to know "what principle of liberty, what principle of honour, what principle of International Law" might be said to have been strengthened by British actions.[43] T.D. Sullivan continued this moralistic tone when he attacked the campaign as a "most miserable and disgraceful war" begun with low financial motivations and ending up as an undisguised war of annexation.[44] It was a "shabby and disreputable business" according to William O'Brien; and T.P. O'Connor declared it the "most infamous, most unjust, and most wicked war of modern times."[45] J.J. O'Kelly accused the Government of "perpetrating a practical joke upon the country" by proposing that the House vote a measure thanking Lord Alcester "for his eminent services in cruelly and heartlessly bombarding the defenceless town of Alexandria." He

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[42] Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyd-Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt from 1882," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* ed. Andrew Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 651-664.

[43] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 280, c. 56, 8 June 1883.

[44] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 280, c. 81, 8 June 1883.

[45] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 280, c. 76, 8 June 1883; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 288, c. 1044, 22 May 1884.

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put it to the House "that a soldier pretending to be civilized should attack a practically

unarmed people and use the powers of civilization simply for the purpose of destruction,

was something a country like this ought to be ashamed of."[46]

Although better known for his extra-parliamentary adventures, O'Kelly was

second only to O'Donnell in his outspoken criticism of British imperial policy. In 1883,

virtually all his parliamentary questions pertained to events outside Ireland.[47] He had

been elected Home Rule MP for North Roscommon in 1880, at which time it seemed the

former Fenian and member of the French Foreign Legion had put his days as a desperado

behind him. Only the previous year, O'Kelly had written a letter suggesting that Irish

Americans might send weapons and ammunition to Cetewayo (the Zulu King then

fighting the British) on the principle that "one million cartridges in the hands of the Zulus

would help the Irish cause more than an equivalent amount of arms landed in Ireland,"

and "in helping the Zulus [they would] help the Afghans and ... ourselves by promoting

the long wished for 'opportunity.'"[48] Even before joining the ranks of the obstructionists

then, O'Kelly was keenly aware of the imperial dimension to Irish politics. The position

of MP provided no income and O'Kelly, as did many of his colleagues, continued to earn

his living as a journalist.[49] When in 1883 the British went to war against the Mahdi in

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[46] Hansard, Third Series, vol. 280, c. 80, 8 June 1883.

[47] His parliamentary questions typically dealt with South Africa, Egypt, or Afghanistan: Hansard, Third Series, vol. 282, cc. 49-50, 7 August 1883; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 282, c. 548, 26 July 1883; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 277, c. 1635, 6 April 1883; Hansard, Third Series, vol. 280, c. 1716, 28 June 1883.

[48] James J. O'Kelly to Michael Davitt, 10 March 1879, published in John Devoy, *Devoy's Post Bag* (vol. I), eds. William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan (Dublin: Fallon Ltd., 1948), 408.

[49] Members of Parliament were not granted a salary until 1911. O'Kelly had written briefly for the *Irishman* and was long-time correspondent for the *New York Herald*. In this latter capacity he covered the Cuban insurgency (from behind rebel lines) against Spain in 1873. He narrowly escaped a Spanish

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Sudan, he convinced London's *Daily News* to send him out to cover the hostilities. Over

the next year, he sent back detailed reports from the war to both the *Daily News* and to

the *Freeman's Journal* in Dublin. O'Kelly, although still a sitting MP, made no effort to

conceal his sympathy with both the nationalists in Egypt and the Mahdi's forces in

Sudan. In addition to his correspondence with European papers, he was closely linked

with Egyptian nationalists through his work for the Cairo based *Bosphore Egyptien*, for

which "directly or indirectly, he was setting the editorial tone." He was "steeped in

revolutionary intrigue" while in Cairo and was at one point arrested on suspicion of

carrying credential papers signed by the Mahdi.[50] O'Kelly was clearly not inclined to

confine his interference in imperial matters to just the floor of Westminster.

In fact, one of the strongest critics of imperial policy in Parnell's movement did

not become an MP until 1890. Alfred Webb, a Dublin printer and outspoken nationalist

activist played an important role in a succession of nationalist organizations from the

1870s onward. In 1873 he become Treasurer of Butt's Home Rule League and in 1882

Treasurer of Parnell's National League. His impact on the nationalist movement,

however, did not stem from these administrative positions. It was, rather, his role as a

public intellectual and his reputation as the unimpeachable voice of moderation that

earned him the respect of more powerful men, and unprecedented access to the letters

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executioner for his pro-Cuban sympathies (if not his outright aiding of the rebels). One of the few existing
accounts of O'Kelly's colorful life may be found in John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel* (Shannon:
Irish University Press, 1969), 333-346.
[50] Niamh O'Sullivan, "Lines of Resistance: The O'Kelly Brothers in the Sudan," *Eire Ireland* 33, no. 3-4
(1998): 151. O'Kelly's brother, Aloysius, an artist for the *Illustrated London News*, was also covering the
war and O'Sullivan argues that his depictions of battles (sometimes from a perspective behind the Mahdi's
lines) suggest that he too saw his role as subversive as opposed to propagandist.

pages of national newspapers. That is not to say that his was always the voice of the majority. As a Quaker, Webb firmly rejected violence and he did not shrink from criticizing groups like the Land League when he believed them guilty of condoning intimidation and bloodshed.[51]

Given this worldview, it is perhaps not surprising that he was highly critical of British imperialism. The Empire, despite its extraordinary reach and resources, had not, he believed, contributed to the happiness and further civilization of the world to any significant degree, but rather, had become a vehicle by which dishonest, uncivilized, and inhumane men might make their fortune. How ironic it was, he said, that "the richest people in the world, the nation believing itself to be the most pious and the most civilised [had] without a shadow of excuse, or sanction of the theories of common honesty to which it pretends to subscribe, invaded and devastated nations in Africa and Asia."[52] The age of imperialism, he said, was one where "supremacy and prestige [had] been made a hideous fetish, before which common honesty and common humanity [was] to be sacrificed."[53]

Yet, like O'Donnell and the other Irish MPs, Webb did not seek Ireland's withdrawal from the Empire. What he wanted, rather ironically, was an expanded imperial role for the Irish; not so as to garner a bigger share of the bounty, but in order that they might take an active role in turning the Empire away from a policy based purely

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[51] Webb, *The Autobiography of a Quaker Nationalist*, 6.
[52] Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Freeman*, 13 December 1880: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (97).
[53] Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Freeman*, 29 March 1880: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (112).

on financial and territorial ambition. "Duty alike to mankind at large and to [their] country," he said, demanded that the Irish combat the sinister element in society that had "for so long swayed the Empire for evil and combated truth, enlightenment, and progress."[54] As things stood, Webb said, the Irish had a "steady hatred" for the Empire. He preached constantly, however, that this did not necessarily have to be the case. If the British were to grant Home Rule, he said, the Irish would "settle down in amity" with them and would take an "honourable" role in carrying out their imperial duties.[55]

So convinced was Webb that Ireland had an imperial destiny that in 1874 and again in 1885, he rejected as acceptable alternatives to Home Rule either separation or dominion status. Were Ireland to become like Canada, he argued, she would forfeit her imperial prerogative and would thereby be guilty of abandoning millions of Indians and Africans to the mercy of unchecked imperialism. The Irish he said, were "citizens of the world as well as citizens of Ireland," and it would therefore be a crime for them "to sacrifice, for selfish isolation, a position in which [they had] it in [their] power to influence for good the fortunes of so many millions who [had] come within the influence of the United Kingdom in her foreign possessions."[56] He clarified this argument in a long letter to the *Freeman*:

> I hate the means by which the Empire has been built up ... Then again - however the Empire has been created, we now owe very distinct duties to weaker peoples that have been brought under its influence. Having broken down old governments, our duty is now by enlightened rule to fit such peoples for the self-

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Spectator*, 30 January 1881: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (115); Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Inquirer*, 17 July 1884: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (141).

[56] Alfred Webb, *Why I desire Home Rule* (Dublin: Alfred Webb, 1874), 17. [Pamphlet NLI: P358 (9)]

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government, which sooner or later must be theirs. Is Ireland to have no part in this work? From our own experience we ought to be peculiarly qualified to sympathise with and understand subject peoples, to stand by them against Imperial tyranny. It would perhaps be easiest to wash our hands of such responsibilities - should we be justified in so doing?[57]

This idea that something good could still be salvaged from imperialism was thus at the heart of the Irish Party's engagement with empire in the early 1880s. O'Donnell, Webb, and the others criticized the nature of Britain's imperial custodianship, but they stopped short of a rejection of the imperial principle, giving their arguments an ambivalence that would be picked apart by later nationalists. In comparison to Isaac Butt, however, their persistent use of anti-imperial rhetoric gave mainstream nationalist discourse an edge it had heretofore lacked. The argument was not separatist in intent, but it was sufficiently innovative to capture the attention of moderate Irish opinion and to steer it in directions quite different from the imperial attitudes seen among Irish Unionists and indeed Britons themselves.

III – Irish Newspapers and the Imperial Question in the 1880s

Some indication as to the impact all this had upon broader nationalist discourse is discernable in the pages of nationalist newspapers in the same period. It is not surprising, given the dominant position of Parnell's party at the time, that many nationalist papers picked up themes similar to those explored by their politicians. Moral indignation was

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[57] Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Freeman*, 26 December 1885: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (150).

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the order of the day, and the dishonorable, irresponsible, and even depraved conduct of British imperialists was repeatedly invoked. As had Alfred Webb, many editorials commented upon the contradiction between the official imperial promise to "civilize" and uplift native peoples and the destructive and decidedly uncivilized conduct of Britain's agents once safely clear of home shores. Several papers echoed O'Donnell and Webb in their characterization of the Empire as representing an enormous missed opportunity to "enlighten" the far corners of the world.

Even among nationalist papers, of course, there was considerable variation in tone, with the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Nation* generally using more moderate language, while the *Irishman* and Parnell's own *United Ireland* resorted to more inflammatory rhetoric. As with the parliamentary party's imperial critique, newspaper anti-imperialism was polemical, and it could be both short on facts and inconsistent in applying its argument. Editors were in addition under pressure to sell their papers, and there can be no question that the blow-by-blow accounts of battles and British calamities were good for circulation.

Certain publications, nonetheless, could claim a long tradition of anti-imperialism. The *Nation*, begun in 1842 by Thomas Davis, was by comparison to the *Irishman* a quite moderate paper, and yet it was remarkably steadfast through the years in its condemnation of British tyranny overseas. In her study of the Irish response to the 1857 Indian Mutiny, Jill Bender identifies the *Nation*, for example, as the only paper that "supported the sepoys from the start." As it had in Davis's time, it made constant parallels between British misrule in India and in Ireland, to the point even of predicting a

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similar anti-imperial outburst by the Irish. Likewise Adam Chill has found that among those Irish papers covering the "Governor Eyre Controversy" in Jamaica in 1865-1866, the *Nation* was the only one to offer a "consistent anti-imperial critique." Fifteen years later, Alfred Webb congratulated the paper's editor for its record of denouncing British imperial policy "in season and out of season."[58]

Anti-imperialism was not, therefore, a new concept to the *Nation*, although it was clearly revitalized by the Irish party's engagement with the subject. Echoing the criticisms offered by O'Donnell and the others, the paper repeatedly focused on the dishonorable conduct of British imperial policy makers and agents. "The record of the making of the British Empire," it said, was "one of the most disgraceful chapters in the world's history. It [was] a story of unjustifiable aggression, broken treaties, plunder, and murder on a gigantic scale."[59] Mockingly declaring that "no other Power in Europe would apply the name of war to a conflict with ... a wild Asiatic tribe," the paper denounced the "mean, cowardly and disgraceful" 1879 British campaign in Afghanistan. It had no doubt that the English would win in the end but, it asked, could it be said they had done so "in a fair and manful style?"[60] The paper denounced the subsequent war against the Zulu people as "a still blacker crime against all divine and human law."[61] And

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[58] Jill C. Bender, "Mutiny or Freedom Fight? The 1857 Indian Mutiny and the Irish Press," in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 94-97; Adam Chill, "Green, Red, and White: Perceptions of Empire in the Irish Press during the Governor Eyre Controversy, 1865-1866," (unpublished paper given at the American Conference of Irish Studies, University of Notre Dame, April 2005), 9; Alfred Webb to the Editor of the *Freeman*, 29 March 1880: Alfred Webb Collection, NLI MSS 1745-7 (112).
[59] *The Nation*, 26 July 1884.
[60] *Ibid.*, 25 January 1879.
[61] *Ibid.*, 8 February 1879.

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while not denying that "the Boers [had] at times been guilty of acts of horrible cruelty towards some of their neighbors," the *Nation* championed their cause and drew attention to the "hollowness and insincerity" of Gladstone's election-time expression of sympathy with struggling nationalities.[62] Finally, calling the war in Sudan "monstrously wanton and inexcusable," the paper seditiously declared that "no right-minded man [ought to] be particularly sorry" to hear of General Gordon's capture and death in Khartoum.[63]

The *Nation* did not deny that other countries, particularly France, were just as guilty of imperial crimes as were the British.[64] The British alone, however, seemed to accomplish their "infamous plans of conquest by mean and dishonourable contrivances, and to pretend that their object [was] 'the spread of civilisation' instead of their own aggrandizement."[65] Echoing O'Donnell and Webb, the leading nationalist paper of the day did not deny that empire could be a positive force, and neither did it deny that Africans were in need of "civilization." In fact, the paper thought it "highly desirable to open up South Africa to the preaching of the Gospel," although it questioned whether it was possible "to compel any people to receive religious truth at the point of a bayonet." There was no reason, however, that "the civilisation of Africa [had] to be brought about by foul injustice and oppression."[66] The problem, then, was not the Empire; it was the shortsighted and immoral attitude of the imperialists.

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[62] *Ibid.*, 1 January and 5 March 1881.
[63] *Ibid.*, 14 February 1885.
[64] *Ibid.*, 30 August 1884.
[65] *The Nation*, 4 April 1885.
[66] *The Nation*, 8 February 1879.

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In its coverage of the imperial crises in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the

Freeman's Journal explored similar themes to those seen in the *Nation*, although it was

generally more circumspect in its language. Unlike other nationalist papers, it did not for

example express any desire to see the British humiliated overseas, and it generally

applauded British military victories. That said, the paper repeatedly questioned the

morality and the motivation of imperial policies. In February 1879 it spoke scornfully of

British aggression against the Zulus, saying that "these attacks on miserable savage

neighbors [had] always been a disgrace to England," but never so much as then, "when

the Queen's soldiers [had] been used in enterprises and for purposes [which] Rob Roy's

caterans would blush at." The paper went on to predict that "such enterprises" would "in

the end bring a curse on the Empire which [indulged] in them."[67]

Later that year, while declaring not to have the "slightest misgiving" that Britain

would ultimately triumph in Afghanistan, it nonetheless wondered; "what is it all for? Is

there one single humane or civilizing consideration in the entire programme and policy?

Is England's only justification for the curse that she is inflicting on these people the sorry

plea that one selfish wickedness involves another?"[68] This question of the ultimate

purpose of the Empire surfaced again in relation to British policy toward the Basuto

people in South Africa. The policy was, the paper said, disappointingly "arbitrary" and it

reflected poorly on those associated with it. During the Egyptian crisis in 1882, the paper

cast doubt on British motivations when it commented that "the whole course of

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[67] *The Freeman's Journal*, 7 February 1879.
[68] *Ibid.*, 13 September 1879.

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England's procedure suspiciously [resembled] that which she [adopted] when actuated by ideas of conquest and the extension of the Imperial sway."[69] The tone of the imperial coverage in the *Freeman's Journal* become increasingly gloomy in the aftermath of the spectacular Boer victory at Majuba Hill in 1881, a victory that prompted the paper to speculate whether the "sun [was] at last setting on that Empire on which it was said it never set?" There followed a somber prediction that "disaster, if not decay, [was] in the wind."[70]

This last possibility was considered with relish by both the *Irishman* (associated with the Fenians) and *United Ireland* (run by Parnell's friend William O'Brien). The Zulu victory in Isandhlwana in February 1879 was "glorious news" to the *Irishman* and such "wonderful tidings" as "must have shot like a flame of fire into every spirit" in Ireland. British imperialism, it declared, was "organized robbery and slaughter," and any losses the Empire incurred were justice served.[71] The Empire's "besetting sin [had] been encroachment on the weak, wild, free nations of the earth," and, the paper prophesied, that "heaven" was about to make it pay for its crimes.[72] A *United Ireland* headline after the bombardment of Alexandria mocked "Heroic England!" whose sailors had been "safe behind iron walls slaughtering men who had nothing to reply to them except shots that fell short, and nothing to shelter them except rotten earthworks."[73] No honorable people would do as British had done in Egypt; "bombard a little enemy and [term] it

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[69] *Ibid.*, 26 February 1881 and 11 August 1882.
[70] *The Freeman's Journal*, 4 March 1881.
[71] *The Irishman*, 15 February 1879 and 1 February 1879.
[72] *The Irishman*, 5 March 1881.
[73] *United Ireland*, 15 July 1882.

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international morality."[74] Was it any wonder the paper asked that "Boers, Irish,

Egyptians, Maories, Hindoos, Afghans, and Zulus [understood] each other so thoroughly

when they [came] to curse the name of England?"[75] Britain had "thriven and fattened ...

by a course of judicious slaughter, pillage, and Bible reading amongst the benighted races

of the earth," and then pretended that its goal all along had been to "extend the influences

of civilisation."[76]

Irishmen made up a considerable part of the British army and it was not unusual

for nationalist newspapers to include, in even the most anti-imperial editorial, fulsome

praise for the valor of Irish soldiers. Most often, however, they simply ignored the thorny

question of imperial complicity and repeated instead the same moral indictment of

imperial policy put forward by their political leaders. At the end of the First South

African war in 1881, the *Nation* noted that "there was one small section of politicians in

the British Empire who [had] a special right to rejoice in the triumph of the Boers." It

referred, of course, to Parnell, O'Donnell, and the others who "had so markedly resisted

the annexation of the Transvaal" over the years.[77] *United Ireland* quipped that J.J.

O'Kelly's "highly skilled and richly informed letters" from Sudan showed that he had a

better grasp of the insurgent tactics and power than Lord Wolseley, the man whom the

British had sent out to defeat the Mahdi.[78]

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[74] *Ibid.*, 22 July, 1882.
[75] *Ibid.*, 29 July, 1882.
[76] *Ibid.*, 14 February 1885.
[77] *The Nation*, 25 March 1881.
[78] *United Ireland*, 21 February 1885.

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It would have been surprising if the Irish press had ignored the question of the Empire in a period of such heightened imperial activity. It is nonetheless difficult to imagine that Irish newspaper coverage of imperial questions would have had quite the same tone had the Irish Party continued to follow Isaac Butt's more conciliatory approach to British imperialism. The Parnellite engagement with imperialism provided a focus to the broader nationalist discourse on empire, and in so doing, it created an opening for those who would ultimately take Irish anti-imperialism in much more radical directions. The real significance of Parnellite anti-imperialism lies thus not in its ideological content so much as in its re-orientation of the mainstream nationalist discourse away from an exclusively metropolitan perspective on empire. This shift in moderate nationalist rhetoric contributed to an atmosphere in which anti-imperialism came to be viewed as a natural component of mainstream nationalism.

There were signs by the mid-1880s that the Parnellites had taken their anti-imperialism as far as it was going to go. The Irish Party's critique of imperial policy was very similar to that of the Liberal Party, and the spotlight it shone on empire's dark places was intended to inspire reform, not revolution.[79] Some Parnellites, as has been seen, went so far as to argue that Home Rule would enable Ireland to exercise more fully its imperial prerogative and to assume the role of imperial reformer. Considering, however, that the British had regarded Irish interference in imperial business at Westminster to be the

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[79] Some Irish MPs nonetheless noted the discrepancy between Gladstone's criticism of imperial expansion and his Government's subsequent policy in Egypt in 1882. See speeches by Justin McCarthy in Hansard, Third Series, vol. 256, c. 919, 31 August 1883 and by T.P. O'Connor in Hansard, Third Series, vol. 276, cc. 2110-211, 16 February 1883.

height of impudence, it seemed implausible that a Home Rule parliament in Dublin would have any role whatsoever, never mind a reforming one, in the administration of the Empire. This realization and the succession of imperial wars in the period raised the unsettling possibility that empire might be "intrinsically oppressive" and fundamentally impervious to reform.[80]

Above all, however, the scope of Parnellite anti-imperialism was limited by its reluctance to challenge the broader assumptions behind the creation and development of the British Empire. The Irish Party did not question the superiority of British institutions and it accepted, by implication, the inferiority of societies not based on those constitutional, economic, cultural, and religious foundations. To challenge those assumptions would involve challenging the superiority of the liberal vision itself, something that Parnell and the others were unlikely to do, given both their alliance with the Liberals and their own respect for the institutions of liberal democracy. The Irish party sought to rectify through Home Rule what was viewed as the incomplete extension of those institutions to Ireland. The party did not argue that Ireland required or desired something fundamentally different from the British system. As far as earlier advanced nationalists like John Mitchel were concerned, of course, those so-called free institutions existed to facilitate more efficient capitalist exploitation, whether by creating an underclass of wage slaves, or by using the military to confiscate the resources of other nations. It was no coincidence that Arthur Griffith would later base his new nationalism

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[80] David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 509.

on the repudiation of the Irish Party's links with the Liberals and their embrace of the liberal vision itself.

In the meantime, Irish MPs continued to make contributions to imperial debates, although after the mid-1880s the coordination and persistence seen in previous campaigns was noticeably absent. For several reasons, the party had effectively abandoned O'Donnell's strategy of imperial interference. The most fundamental of these, of course, is the fact that the party's primary focus in the mid-1880s was the impending Home Rule Bill (1886). Were anti-imperialism to be officially enshrined as party policy, it would have almost certainly been seized upon by Unionists as further evidence that Home Rule was a plot against the Empire itself. A second factor was that Parnell in 1885 declined to re-nominate Frank Hugh O'Donnell as a Home Rule candidate, and the party's most energetic and consistent anti-imperial spokesman lost his seat. The two men had never liked each other, and while there may have been a clash of priorities, this was almost certainly superseded by a clash of egos. Finally, Parnell in the late 1880s accepted a £10,000 political contribution from Cecil Rhodes, and the remnants of his party welcomed well-known Rhodes associate and imperial enthusiast, J. Rochfort Maguire, as MP for West Clare in the 1890s. The donation was made on the understanding that Parnell, in the event that Home Rule was granted, would not object to continued Irish representation in the imperial parliament.[81] This arrangement did not necessarily preclude the Irish from continuing to investigate imperial misadventures, but

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[81] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and His Party* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 266, n. 4. Rhodes felt Irish participation was necessary to the success of a future federated empire.

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since Rhodes's name was often at the end of such investigations, aggressive insistence on imperial transparency became somewhat impolitic.

IV - Irish Anti-Imperialism 1890 - 1899

That is not to imply that anti-imperialism disappeared from the broader nationalist discourse in the 1880s, only to reappear in time for the Second South African War in 1899. The wellspring for the Irish critique of imperialism was increasingly less likely to be the parliamentary party, however. As the party's official policy shifted away from imperial questions, Irish anti-imperialism was once more being sustained by elements outside the nationalist mainstream, individuals who, for one reason or another, were more critical of liberal ideology than had been the Parnellites. One of the most persistent and influential of these individuals was Michael Davitt. Davitt's own anti-imperialism was part of a broader critique of modern society and was inseparable from his labor advocacy and his commitment to land reform. Like Patrick Ford in America, Davitt represented a nationalist constituency that had taken Mitchel's anti-imperialism very much to heart. His critique of empire was thus implicitly more revolutionary than that of the Parnellites, and it presaged the emergence of an even more radical Irish anti-imperial discourse in the late 1890s. Davitt's place within the nationalist movement is not easy to categorize, largely because at various points in his long career he was associated with every nationalist organization from Fenianism to the parliamentary party. This also helps explain, however, his enormous influence on both the development of the movement and on nationalist discourse itself.

In 1850, when he was just four years old, Davitt's family was evicted from their

Co. Mayo holding and forced to emigrate to Lancashire. Obliged by poverty to find work

in a factory, he lost an arm in an industrial accident at age eleven. Though a tragedy, this

accident saved Davitt from a lifetime of such work and it afforded him the chance to

finish his education. He became apprenticed to a local post-master, and like many Irish

youths in similar circumstances, he joined the Fenians. Arrested for gun-running in 1870,

Davitt served seven years in British prisons under the harshest of conditions. His

experience left him especially sensitive to the problems of those at the bottom of modern

society and his career may be summed up as a long critique of that society, both as it

existed in Britain and in the Empire.[82]

Although he was to become one of the most esteemed and influential of Irish

nationalists, Davitt's working class background, sensitive personality, and cosmopolitan

politics at times alienated him from the nationalist elite. Something of a puritan, he

disapproved of certain of his colleagues London lifestyles, and though he served twice as

an MP in the 1890s he never lost his distaste for the regimented formality of

parliamentary life. He was more interested in the problems and everyday hardships faced

by the urban poor and the peasant, and even to contemporaries he was known as someone

with broad interests and a passion for grand ideas.

Upon his release from prison in 1878, Davitt quite quickly indicated his support

for the radical wing of the parliamentary party, seeing in its aggressively obstructionist

policy an opportunity to "[broaden] the basis of nationalist action without impairing the

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[82] Carla King, *Michael Davitt* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press for the Historical Association of Ireland, 1999).

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integrity of Fenianism."[83] Much of the credit he and other advanced nationalists extended to the parliamentarians in the early 1880s was at least partly an acknowledgement of the anti-imperial rhetoric employed by Parnell's radical Home Rule wing. Obstruction, in this regard, was he said, "a necessary medium for the expression of [Irish] ... hostility and contempt for the parliamentary *sanctum sanctorum* of the British Empire."[84] Indeed, from this early period in his career, Davitt was deeply aware of the imperial dimension to the Irish Question. The fifth and final of the "New Departure" proposals in 1879 was that the Irish would advocate on behalf of "all the struggling nationalities in the British Empire and elsewhere."[85] The inclusion of this clause likely reflects Davitt's influence. It was his interpretation of O'Donnell's concept of the Irish as the natural advocates of the colonized.

Davitt is best known, however, for his association with the Land League and its campaign (1879-1881) for reform of the landlord system in Ireland. He traveled and spoke extensively in America in these years, and he became a close friend of Patrick Ford in New York. He was the Irish link in Ford's effort to connect evictions in Mayo with exploitative labor practices in the United States. It was at Ford's home that he first met Henry George, author of *Progress and Poverty* and advocate of land nationalization, a concept that was to become something of an obsession for Davitt. It was not an entirely new idea to him as he was aware that James Fintan Lalor had briefly advocated a

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[83] Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution*, 205.
[84] Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 109.
[85] Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 126. The "New Departure" of 1879 was a loose alliance between land reform radicals (Davitt's Land League), separatist radicals (Fenians), and Charles Stewart Parnell's radical wing of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

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similarly radical scheme in the 1840s. Davitt's advocacy of land nationalization was largely responsible for his alienation from the mainstream leadership, for whom the concept was too radical to put before the British government, never mind before the Irish farmers. Dismissing the scheme as unworkable, Parnell allegedly said of Davitt that he "would get stoned by the farmers only he talks Greek to them."[86]

Davitt, however, became convinced that nationalization and re-distribution was the only equitable solution to the land question in Ireland. Like Lalor, he argued that land ownership was the natural right of every Irishman. "The advocacy of individualism as against socialism," he would later say, "is the advocacy of the cold-blooded doctrine of political economy against natural cause and natural right."[87] Many of Davitt's nationalist colleagues were quick to distance themselves from what they saw as his dangerously "internationalist" sentiments. Frank Hugh O'Donnell dismissed Davitt as a "Lancashire Socialist-Radical under ... Hibernian varnish," and said of him that he "always was a cosmopolitan workman far more than an Irish Nationalist."[88] Even the Fenian leader John O'Leary questioned the direction in which his friend's politics were moving. He wrote to John Devoy that Davitt had admitted to being a "convinced Socialist," and that, as such, there was a danger of him becoming a liability to the nationalist movement.[89]

In public at least, Davitt repeatedly denied being a Socialist, and most historians are inclined to class him as an "independent reformer," who, although he had close ties

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[86] William O'Brien, *Recollections* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), 269.
[87] Quoted in Laura McNeil, "Land, Labor, and Liberation: Michael Davitt and the Irish Question in the Age of British Democratic Reform, 1878-1906" (Chestnut Hill: Boston College Ph.D., 2002), 250.
[88] O'Donnell, *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, vol. II, 367, 334, 393.
[89] John O'Leary to John Devoy, 14 June 1882. Published in *Devoy's Post Bag*, vol. II 1880-1928, eds. William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan (Dublin: Fallon Ltd, 1948), 125.

with Socialists and Radicals, never became a formal member of either group.[90] Indeed, in

common with Parnell, Davitt had great deal of respect for the British liberal democratic

tradition.[91] The Irish complaint against the English, he said, was not founded primarily

on disagreement over the nature and value of British institutions. It was based, rather, on

the fact that Ireland was "ruled from London instead of from Dublin, by Englishmen

instead of [Irishmen]."[92] And although he steadfastly refused to disavow armed struggle,

Davitt was a reformer more than a revolutionary. The challenge before Irish nationalism,

he believed, stemmed not from an army or a government, but from an ideology that

promoted inequality both at an individual and an international level. The only effective

weapons against that challenge were social and political reform. "The principles of

reform," were, he said, "far more destructive to unjust and worn-out systems than

dynamite bombs, which only kill individuals, or knock down buildings."[93]

Liberalism may have sponsored democracy, then, but it was an incomplete

democracy that had resulted in inequality, social injustice, and on an international level,

an empire built upon coercion rather than cooperation. These problems had a common

source, Davitt argued, and to address them properly required that they be acknowledged

as inter-connected. Like the Parnellites, he did not doubt the ultimate superiority of

British institutions, but unlike them, he believed that the problems inherent in

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[90] McNeil, "Land, Labor, and Liberation," 259.

[91] Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution*, 509; McNeil, "Land, Labor, and Liberation," 259.

[92] Michael Davitt, "Ireland's Appeal to America," *Denvir's Monthly Irish Library*, No. 3 March 1902 (London) republished in Michael Davitt, *Pamphlets, Speeches and Articles, 1889-1906*, ed. Carla King (Bristol: Thoemmes Press and Edition Synapse, 2001), 7.

[93] Michael Davitt, "The Report of the Parnell Commission," *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 27 (March 1890), 357-83 republished in Michael Davitt, *Pamphlets, Speeches and Articles, 1889-1906*, 11.

imperialism were inseparable from the problems within British society itself. As Laura

McNeil has observed, "for Davitt, labor advocacy, land reform activism, and Irish

nationalism were part of the same movement for democratic reform in the British Isles."[94]

He saw anti-imperialism as a way to take that same struggle to an international front.

Indeed, comments toward the end of Davitt's *Life and Progress in Australasia*

demonstrate the depth of his conviction to this very catholic approach to reform. He had

read John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* years before, he said, and at the time had greatly

admired Mitchel's "splendid hatred of alien domination in Ireland." Yet, when on his

travels he reread the book from a "broad humanitarian," rather than a strictly Irish

standpoint, he had "discovered its appalling narrowness of spirit and lamentable want of

fairness." What Davitt found most disappointing was Mitchel's snobbery and his open

contempt for the ordinary convicts with whom he was forced to share the Van Diemen's

Land penal colony. In Davitt's mind, they were victims of the same system as Mitchel,

transported because they had "sinned against the rights of that property which he had

himself so eloquently denounced." Mitchel too had linked imperialism with the broader

problems of social injustice and poverty. He had little faith in the common man,

however, and he would have scoffed at Davitt's belief that the solution to society's ills

lay in the expansion of democracy. Democracy was to Mitchel another of liberalism's

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[94] McNeil, "Land, Labor, and Liberation," 281.

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false and destructive freedoms. This realization left Davitt deflated and, he "almost

regretted having opened the *Jail Journal*" a second time.[95]

It is not surprising, in this context, that Davitt found so intriguing Patrick Ford's

linking of the American labor question with that of imperialism. Like Ford, he was highly

critical of so-called "Society," that segment of the population made up of "idle, wealthy

... loafers" who lived off the labor of the majority. Not content to confine their

exploitation to home shores, they plundered Ireland and India before setting about the

"slicing up of Africa." Workingmen should not be surprised to see the way in which

Society "fawned upon and flattered ... African Freebooters" like Sir Bartle Frere. The

British aristocracy had after all "coined hard cash out of the 'civilizing' work done" by

the likes of Frere and Jameson. Justice, for both the laborer and the colonized, demanded

that this parasitic class be "compelled to disgorge their blood-stained plunder."[96] For

Davitt then, issues of class went to the very heart of imperial exploitation. Imperial

reform was possible, he felt, but it could only succeed if accompanied by simultaneous

reform of Britain's class system and its plutocratic politics.

Once the critical issues of class and social equality were addressed, Davitt argued

that the Empire could be reconceived in such a way as to both preserve imperial unity and

acknowledge the sovereignty of constituent nations. The imperial relationship did not

have to be based on unilateral coercion and exploitation. He cited as proof of this theory

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[95] Michael Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press and Edition Synapse, 2001), 334-335. Originally published in London for Methuen & Co., 1898.

[96] *The Labour World*, 22 November 1890. Davitt edited this short-lived London paper from September 1890 to May 1891. It was in the November 22nd issue that he became the first major nationalist figure to call on Parnell to resign (after the O'Shea affair). Thereafter the paper's content was dominated by the politics of "The Split."

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the considerable imperial enthusiasm of Australians, even those of Irish descent. Davitt

concluded that Australians were loyal to the Empire and willing to profess their

allegiance to the British Crown because they were permitted a measure of legislative

control over domestic issues and were allowed "to tax anything coming from England

which [might] compete with Australian production." For this reason, he concluded, any

outside threat to the Empire "would call for and receive responsive sympathy and

support" from "almost all" Australians.[97]

The same could not be said of the Irish or the Indians because they knew an

entirely different face of empire. In those places, imperialism was for the exclusive

benefit of the metropolitan nation, or more specifically, the aristocrats and capitalists of

that nation. The Irish were not offered the relative benefits of British democracy and

liberal institutions. The British, "the alleged pioneers of parliaments, progress,

enlightenment, and prosperity" did not promote any of those things across most of their

Empire, because in "war, politics, and progress, they [were] the preachers of the true

Anglo-Saxon Gospel, whose accommodating precept is, 'Do as I want you to do, not as I

do myself.'"[98] As had the Parnellites, Davitt suggested that were the British to take a

more realistic approach to their Empire, and to see imperialism in terms of a global

system of partnership, rather than as a license to plunder, the Irish might become loyal

imperial subjects. He made this explicit in an 1896 letter to the *Times*:

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[97] Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia*, 130.
[98] Michael Davitt, "Ireland's Appeal to America," 4; Michael Davitt, "What I Think of the English," *The Universal Magazine*, vol. 1 (July 1900), 425-26. republished in Michael Davitt, *Pamphlets, Speeches and Articles, 1889-1906*, 3.

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If Home Rule is only to be obtained ... on the understanding ... that Ireland will sanction and uphold a policy of injustice and aggression against weak nations or unarmed "savage" peoples whenever it may please a chartered company to "extend the bounds of the Empire" in order to grab some goldfield ... let me say ... that I would spurn a degrading liberty of that kind. [An empire based on a] policy of justice and humanity, on the other hand, is one that Irishmen of all parties would approve and uphold.[99]

Davitt's belief in the possibility of such a re-imagined empire was constantly challenged by unfolding imperial events. As Mitchel had been, Davitt was repeatedly struck by the gap between high-minded imperial propaganda and the ugly and often bloody imperial reality. He predicted that history would find "the horrors sanctioned and perpetrated by Englishmen" to be the worst of all imperialisms. They were the "worst in themselves, and the worst also because accompanied by such abominable hypocrisy and cant." Other imperial powers such as France and Portugal admitted that their empires were "merely for their own profit" and they "never pretended to annex territory for the good for the natives."[100] On his trip through the Antipodes, Davitt noted that the native population had in fact been "literally 'wiped out' by that Anglo-Saxon genius for civilization." The usual excuses were given on behalf of the conquerors: "Stories galore are told, of course, about fiendish murders by the blacks, mutilations, outrages, and nameless horrors perpetrated upon the innocent whites, whose only mission," he noted with sarcasm, "was to Christianize and reclaim their coloured Brethren." It was he said, "the same old story that has been told of every country which the white man coveted, and

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[99] *The Times*, 17 January 1896.
[100] *The Labour World*, 22 November 1890.

of every native race that has attempted to arrest its conquest and destruction ... humanity unappreciated on the one hand; untamable, savage ferocity on the other."[101]

In October 1899, Davitt resigned his Westminster seat as a protest against Britain's declaration of war against the Transvaal Boers. Within a few months, he was on a ship to South Africa to investigate for himself the war he predicted would "rank in history as the greatest crime of the nineteenth century." He stated again that, not even were it to guarantee Ireland a republic, would he support such imperial tyranny. The Irish, he told the Commons, would "not purchase liberty for Ireland at the base price of voting against liberty in South Africa." Davitt believed that the record of the British Empire had proven how insincere were British claims to be the protector of native populations. Sounding very much like John Mitchel, he marveled that the British, though "Godless themselves ... are persuaded, nevertheless, that the world will become more 'Godly,' be better and happier, the more their Godless rule is spread by wars, conquests, capital, bibles, missionaries, and gin, and all the other things that follow in the footsteps of English commercial civilisation round the world."[102]

Britain's war against the Boers undermined Davitt's belief in the possibility of real imperial reform. Although he was himself a separatist, he had argued from a pragmatic standpoint that there were conditions under which Ireland would willingly accept and embrace a continued imperial connection. His was, nonetheless, a more radical critique of empire than that of other Parnellites, insomuch as he explicitly linked

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[101] Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia*, 331.
[102] Michael Davitt, "What I Think of the English," *The Universal Magazine*, vol. 1 (July 1900), 425-26. republished in Michael Davitt, *Pamphlets, Speeches and Articles, 1889-1906*, 2-3.

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imperialism to social and economic problems within liberal society itself. In so doing,

Davitt became the first senior constitutionalist to argue that the mere replication in

Ireland of British society (as it then stood) would not constitute a victory for nationalism.

Implicit in his thinking were many of the arguments John Mitchel had made against

liberal ideology. The difference between he and Mitchel, however, was that Davitt

believed that the injustices within liberal society might be addressed and that one of the

side effects of a more democratic Britain would be an empire based on consent and

cooperation rather than coercion and exploitation.

It is not accurate to imply that nationalists after Davitt were unconcerned with

cosmopolitan questions such as imperialism.[103] Davitt's critique of the British Empire

was by the late 1890s in fact overtaken by a much more uncompromising Irish anti-

imperialism, which was both extremely critical of many aspects of liberal ideology and

explicitly separatist. Indeed, to a new generation of nationalists there was little to

distinguish Davitt's position on empire from that of the Parnellites. To Arthur Griffith,

Davitt remained a liberal apologist and too fond of invoking the value of British

democratic institutions.[104] Griffith did not believe that British democracy, that is the

fullest expression of the British people's wishes, would underwrite Irish independence.

James Connolly acknowledged Davitt's critique of the British class system and his

advocacy on behalf of British labor, but he accused him of failing to apply the same

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[103] Carla King, "Michael Davitt, Irish nationalism and the British empire," in *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness*, 1837-1901, ed. Peter Gray (UK: Four Courts Press, 2004), 130.
[104] Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life 1891-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), 51.

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critique to Ireland and of neglecting the Irish working class.[105] And, although Irish nationalism continued to be heavily dependent on American support, neither Griffith nor Connolly had Davitt's sentimental attachment to America or his faith in American exceptionalism.

Connolly expressly rejected either France or the United States as model republics on which Ireland might base its nationalist vision. The revolution he envisaged was not simply against the British, but against "that system of capitalism and landlordism, of which the British Empire" was only the "most aggressive type."[106] The liberal system, he argued, was at the heart of all social injustices including imperialism. Unlike Davitt, he did not believe those injustices could be addressed through a simple extension of democracy or within the context of a reformed imperial system. Rather, by "calling attention to evils inherent in that social system," his Irish Socialist Republican Party founded "its propaganda upon discontent with social iniquities which [would] only pass away when the Empire [was] no more."[107]

Connolly consequently had little patience with constitutionalism, and he dismissed Home Rule as "a method whereby the English legislature might [be] relieved of some of its duties at home, and thus left more free to pursue its policy of plunder and aggression abroad."[108] His paper, The Worker's Republic, delighted in exposing what it declared was the hypocrisy of Ireland's "respectable" nationalist newspapers. It noted

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[105] James Connolly, "A Text for a Revolutionary Lecture," The Harp (New York), August 1908.
[106] The Shan Van Vocht, January 1897.
[107] The Shan Van Vocht, August 1897.
[108] James Connolly, Erin's Hope: The End and the Means, (Dublin: Sphinx, 1935), 8-9. First published 1897

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that the editors of those papers, all of whom were "uncompromising patriots," had one week attended a banquet in which Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen were toasted, and the following week attended another banquet in which toasts were drunk to "the health of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, the Army, Navy and Police."[109] Posing the question as to what the difference was between a Unionist and a Home Ruler, the paper answered:

> Starting from the postulate that we accept Mitchel's definition of the British Empire, as "a pirate institution robbing and plundering upon the public highway," we must conclude that the Unionists wish to keep the Irish people *as subjects* of the British Empire, the Home Ruler desires to raise them to the dignity of *accomplices.*[110]

Connolly was part of a new generation of Irish agitators, and nationalist discourse would soon reflect the more radical anti-imperial tone associated both with his newspaper and that of Arthur Griffith. The Second South African War, as will be seen in the next chapter, was a critical factor in the acceleration of this shift within nationalist discourse, a shift that had been over fifty years in the making.

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This chapter has argued that while anti-imperial rhetoric occupied a relatively constant position within Irish nationalist political discourse in the 1880s and 1890s, the underlying inspiration for that anti-imperialism changed over time. For the Parnellites, British imperialism was a badly managed but redeemable political system. Michael

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[109] *The Worker's Republic*, 27 August 1898.
[110] *The Worker's Republic*, 20 August 1898.

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Davitt saw imperialism as a function of the oligarchic corruption and incomplete

democratization of liberal society. Anti-imperialism in the 1890s would, to an extent,

reflect both of these positions. It also reflected the cultural exclusiveness of the Gaelic

revival and a corresponding new twist on Fenian separatism. Most significant in terms of

Irish political discourse, however was its sustained and sophisticated critique of

liberalism. The full measure of that critique would be exposed at the end of the decade

and in the context of the South African War. What the American Civil War had been to

John Mitchel, this war would be to Arthur Griffith; a determining battle in the struggle

between traditional notions of national right and the consuming needs of cosmopolitan

capitalism. In the 1880s it had still been possible for Irish nationalists to be openly

critical of British handling of imperial affairs while accepting and even embracing the

notion of a continued, and in some cases expanded, imperial role for Ireland.[111] To

advanced nationalists in the 1890s, however, the anti-imperial rhetoric employed by Irish

MPs appeared increasingly at odds with their professed goal of "Home Rule," which,

stripped bare amounted to an imperial solution to the Irish question.

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[111] David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 505-506.

Chapter IV

The South African War, 1899-1902

The Second South African War in 1899 offered advanced nationalists the
opportunity to reclaim anti-imperialism as a form of separatist nationalism. This they did
very effectively. Although at the war's end Arthur Griffith and James Connolly remained
on the margins of Irish politics, they had wrought control of one of the most dynamic
currents within nationalist discourse and had established themselves as heirs to the anti-
imperial nationalism first articulated by Thomas Davis and John Mitchel. In the process,
they succeeded in identifying John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party as the party of
empire. While it may not have appeared so at the time then, Griffith and Connolly
emerged from the war with the ideological advantage in the sense that they were now
identified as the most anti-imperial element within Irish nationalism. This was enough to
sustain their respective movements until the next imperial crisis – the Great War – once
again put the Irish Parliamentary Party and the British Empire on the defensive.

Irish anti-imperialism as it emerged in the context of the South African War was
above all a defense of the principle of nationality. The Boers were cast as, like the Irish,

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a sovereign people whom the British Empire had robbed of the right to a peaceful national existence. The war gave radical nationalists an appreciation for the rallying power of anti-imperial rhetoric, and it provided them a compelling issue with which to hold constitutionalists to account for the gap between their revolutionary rhetoric and their (necessarily) more conservative politics. The taunt that Home Rulers were "imperialists with a grievance" proved to have considerable sticking power partly because Irish MPs never really refuted it. To a certain extent this was due to their being forced to operate politically within the imperial parliament at Westminster, but it was also because many of them genuinely believed that the Empire could evolve into a benign association of equals.[1] The South African War, however, marked the beginning of a period in which the reformist anti-imperialism of the 1880s was directly challenged and eventually eclipsed by a new and more aggressively separatist anti-imperialism. In terms of Irish nationalist discourse, the culmination of this process was the 1916 Rising.

I – Before the War

Prior to the 1880s, anti-imperial rhetoric was more prevalent among individuals outside the nationalist mainstream, individuals who were often already inclined toward separatism. The profile of Irish anti-imperialism became more complex in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Parnell's movement had placed heavy emphasis on imperial issues, and he and his colleagues had often used anti-imperial rhetoric, while

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[1] *The United Irishman*, 23 March 1901.

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nonetheless disavowing separatism. This, however briefly, gave the appearance of an anti-imperial consensus among nationalists. At the same time, the relationship between imperialism, capitalism, and political corruption became a recurring theme in the 1890s in the ideology of influential nationalist thinkers such as Michael Davitt and James Connolly. Their economic critique of empire was not new, and Connolly's analysis in particular had much in common with that of both John Mitchel and Patrick Ford. Going into the twentieth century then, both middle-class and working-class nationalists were already accustomed to seeing imperial questions linked to those nearer home.

Political anti-imperialism would have had considerably less resonance in Ireland as this time had its development not coincided with the cultural revival of the 1890s. The central theme of the Gaelic Revival was that imperial culture had overwhelmed and submerged Ireland's distinct national literature, music, language, and sport. The revival's origins can be traced to the emergence in the 1880s of a number of cultural and athletic groups, which had in common the goal of de-Anglicizing Ireland. Far from being the exclusive domain of intellectuals, the revival had a broad-based popular element, and organizations such as the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association attracted tens of thousands of members. Nor was the revival of Irish traditions seen as mere cosmetic nationalism. Should they have "nothing to inspire [them] at home," revivalists claimed, the Irish would "turn to England, becoming in time, mere imitators of her music, art, and literature. [They would] become a nation of money-seekers, whose highest ideal will be that of a bourgeois democracy, with nothing better to hope for than material

prosperity."[2] Anglicization was thus a by-word for materialism, commercialism, cosmopolitanism, irreligion, immorality, and social decay. In this regard, the Irish language was seen by some revivalists as an essential preventative against "the materialism and unbelief of London."[3] There can be little question that the expressly anti-cosmopolitan atmosphere fostered by the Gaelic Revival increased popular hostility toward the Empire, and served to accentuate the political anti-imperialism of mainstream nationalists.

Initially, most of the Revival's literary and cultural organizations explicitly eschewed politics. This drew the criticism of more advanced nationalists, James Connolly among them. Connolly was not against antiquarian societies *per se*, but he warned that there was a "danger that by ... neglect of vital living issues, they [would] only succeed in ... crystallizing nationalism into a tradition – glorious and heroic indeed, but still only a tradition."[4] Renewed interest in one component of the nationalist historical canon, however, proved to be of much greater political significance than Connolly perhaps allowed for. The rediscovery of Young Ireland introduced a new and highly receptive generation to Thomas Davis's concept of a pure Irish culture and to John Mitchel's wholesale rejection of liberal political and economic ideology. The Young Ireland message appealed to a surprising variety of nationalists. To the extent that Davis and Mitchel had intertwined culture and politics, the politicization of those societies dedicated to their memory was hardly surprising.

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[2] *The United Irishman*, 9 September 1899.
[3] *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901.
[4] *The Shan Van Vocht*, January 1897.

Matthew Kelly has undertaken an important study of one such society, a group he

identifies as "the organizational crucible of the literary revival and cultural nationalism"

of the 1880s.[5] Founded in Dublin in 1881 as a literary club, the Young Ireland Society

had an undeniable, if initially fairly tame, nationalist orientation. The society was taken

over by a faction of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in the early 1880s, and

although this gave it a more political focus, it also touched off a series of internal feuds.

Most advanced nationalists in the 1880s and 1890s, including Griffith, Gonne, Yeats and

many lesser-known individuals, were sworn into the IRB as a matter of course. That

Fenianism continued to carry political weight for this new generation of nationalists was

in large degree due to the popular affection for John O'Leary, whose Fenian activities

had resulted in a nine-year prison term (1865-1874) and subsequent eleven years in exile

(in Paris, 1874-1885). O'Leary was elected president of the Young Ireland Society in

1885, and he quickly revitalized and re-organized the group. Kelly identifies him as the

leader of a "second generation of Fenians" who, rather than fading into irrelevance,

"responded to the ascendancy of constitutional nationalism by developing within

Fenianism a fresh separatist dynamic based on the nurture of a distinctly Irish culture."[6]

O'Leary, in other words, recognized that the Irish Parliamentary Party could not

incorporate Davis and Mitchel into the Westminster arena, and that an opportunity

therefore existed for a more explicitly Irish and separatist nationalist alternative.[7]

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[5] Matthew Kelly, "Dublin Fenianism in the 1880s: 'The Irish Culture of the Future'?" *The Historical Journal*, 43, 3 (2000), 731.

[6] Kelly, "Dublin Fenianism in the 1880s," 731.

[7] Historians have identified a "crisis of expectations" within nationalism in the period. "Irish

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O'Leary still had the classic Fenian distaste for constitutionalism, yet in contrast

to some of his old colleagues, he was willing to give Parnell's party a chance. His

relative moderation and patience allowed the Young Ireland Society to thrive even at the

height of Parnellism. Meanwhile, he used his position at the head of the group to foster

"an environment for the nourishment of a sophisticated cultural separatism under the

leadership of an emergent intelligentsia."[8] Members included Isaac Butt's old ally Alfred

Webb, who gave a paper entitled "On the Footsteps of Some of the Men of '48" to the

Belfast branch of the society.[9] But more significant was the new blood O'Leary

attracted: in addition to students from Trinity College, he also brought to the society

individuals like W.B. Yeats, Irish language enthusiast Douglas Hyde, and Maud Gonne.[10]

Inspired by Davis, Mitchel, and O'Leary, they would go on to play leading roles in the

cultural revival of the 1890s and in the anti-imperial movement during the South African

War. Almost without exception, the leaders of the Irish Transvaal Committee were at

one time associated with the Young Ireland Society and its offshoot, the Celtic Literary

Society. One of O'Leary's objectives was to counter the hegemony of the parliamentary

party by consciously fostering separatism among a new generation of nationalist youth.

The degree to which this strategy was successful may be judged from an 1885 notice in

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parliamentarians," Alvin Jackson observed, "invoked the names of cultural nationalists like Thomas Davis
or fiery rebels like John Mitchel, while not actively pursuing the manifestos of these men." Jackson,
Ireland, 170.
[8] Kelly, "Dublin Fenianism in the 1880s," 748.
[9] *The Northern Patriot*, 9 October 1896.
[10] Many of the same individuals would be associated too with the influential Contemporary Club (1886).

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the *Nation* recording the fact that Arthur Griffith, the fourteen-year-old secretary of the

Junior Young Ireland Society, had recently given a paper on John Mitchel.[11]

Even as anti-imperialism reached a crescendo at the time of the South African

War, the vast majority of Irish nationalists still gave their political support to the Irish

Party and moderate organizations like William O'Brien's United Irish League.[12] "To the

contemporary observer," as Roy Foster has argued, "there was far more political energy

displayed by this kind of activity than by the irreconcilably separatist underground."[13]

Advanced nationalists such as Griffith and Connolly, while having the support of many

Dubliners, were some years away from becoming a significant force in national politics.

The momentum of Irish anti-imperial discourse, however, had shifted unmistakably in

favor of individuals from the revivalist milieu, none of them more significant than Arthur

Griffith. Although he and James Connolly remained on the margins of the larger

nationalist movement, they had a disproportionate degree of influence on political

discourse. Their relatively strong position in Dublin and their flair for journalism,

combined with a provocative, persistent, and simple message, gave their arguments a

force that greatly exceeded their actual political strength. Few would have predicted

nonetheless that their influence would far outlast the South African crisis. Arthur

Griffith, James Connolly, and Maud Gonne were the central figures in the Irish Transvaal

Committee (ITC), a Dublin based organization that became the most outspoken pro-Boer

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[11] *The Nation*, 14 February 1885, cited in Kelly, "Dublin Fenianism in the 1880s," 750.
[12] Founded by Davitt and William O'Brien in 1898, the United Irish League was an extra-parliamentary grassroots organization that, in cooperation with the Irish Parliamentary Party, campaigned for land reform based on a scheme of compulsory purchase.
[13] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 432.

faction of Irish nationalism. Before detailing the three leaders' collective activity, however, it will be helpful to first know a little about their backgrounds.

Arthur Griffith, the "supreme propagandist" of Irish nationalism, was largely responsible for setting the tempo of Irish pro-Boer activity.[14] Born into a family of Dublin printers in 1871, he had an early connection to organized nationalism and had been a staunch supporter of Parnell. He never forgave either the Liberal Party or the anti-Parnellite MPs for what he considered as their conspiracy against "the Chief." Griffith's loyalty to Parnell seems to have owed less to any specific regard for his politics, than to his seeing him as the chosen leader of the Irish people, a heroic avatar of the Irish spirit.[15] A member of the Junior Young Ireland Society and later, the Celtic Literary Society, he was very much a part of the Gaelic Revival scene in the 1890s. His best friend in these pursuits was William Rooney. Rooney appears to have been the more energetic of the two, and the force behind much of Griffith's early nationalist activities.[16] Griffith himself was considered rather reticent and even awkward. Maud Gonne, upon first meeting him, described him as "a fair, shy boy one would hardly notice ... [and who] did not speak." She remembered, nonetheless, being immediately attracted to some indeterminable quality in him.[17]

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[14] Richard Davis, "Arthur Griffith 1872-1922 Architect of Modern Ireland," *History Today* vol. 29 no. 3 (1979), 139.
[15] Padraic Colum, *Ourselves Alone! The Story of Arthur Griffith and the Origin of the Irish Free State* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1959), 26.
[16] George A. Lyons, *Some Recollections of Griffith and His Times* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1923), 7.
[17] Maud Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne, A Servant of the Queen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 94.

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Infused with the spirit of the Gaelic Revival, both Rooney and Griffith were determined to resurrect the vision of nationality that had been at the center of the Young Ireland program in the 1840s. Rooney clearly had Thomas Davis in mind when he defined nationality as "that all-embracing quality which holds everything characteristic of the country as sacred, which concerns itself with the minutest fragments that typify and define a distinct civilization, which zealously guards and fosters everything that keeps the land and the people in it one among the people of the world, and educates every inhabitant to the errors of the past, the needs of the present, and the possibilities of the future."[18] This notion of nationality as the life force of a people, and the essential guarantor of their past, present, and future, explains why, like the Young Irelanders, Griffith and Rooney deemed any kind of cosmopolitanism as inherently destructive. The cosmopolite, in this view, was someone inclined to automatically accept foreign culture and foreign ideas as superior to that of his own people.[19]

Griffith then, was keen to establish his own nationalist perspective as heir to the nationalism of the 1840s.[20] He looked to John Mitchel, even more than to Davis, as the epitome of the uncompromising patriot rebel and the implacable foe of utilitarian political economy and cosmopolitanism. There were many parallels in the two men's thinking. As had Mitchel, Griffith glorified the self-sufficient citizen, and he was intensely proud

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[18] Cited in Colum, *Ourselves Alone*, 25. Rooney was often compared to Davis, a comparison made all the more appropriate by his death in 1901, aged just twenty seven; See *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901.
[19] *The United Irishman*, 9 September 1899. This is a lengthy statement of the case against cosmopolitanism.
[20] Maume, "Young Ireland, Arthur Griffith, and Republican Ideology," 163, 169; Donal McCartney, "The Political Use of History in the Work of Arthur Griffith," *Journal of contemporary History*, 8 no. 1 (1974), 16-17.

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of his own background as a member of Dublin's independent-minded artisan class.[21] The

circumstances of his upbringing shaped his understanding of social, economic, and

international relations, just as they conditioned Griffith to view the British Empire as,

before all else, an economic parasite. Like Mitchel, he sought to de-mythologize that

Empire by exposing what he insisted was its naked commercial rationale. "The doctrine

of imperialism," Griffith said, was little more than an attempt to crystallize "commercial

competition" into a sentiment.[22] Mitchel's dire assessment of the combined threat posed

by liberalism and imperialism, Griffith believed, had been validated by the social and

economic situation in late nineteenth-century Ireland. Parts of the countryside continued

to experience episodic famine conditions, while the *Freeman's Journal* reported Dublin's

mortality rate in 1899 as being more than twice that of London.[23]

After failing to find work in Dublin, Griffith emigrated in 1896 to the Transvaal

region of South Africa, where he became editor of a small pro-Boer newspaper called

The Courant.[24] His experience in South Africa seems to have further confirmed for him

the validity of John Mitchel's anti-imperial critique. The Boer farmers, for Griffith,

epitomized the kind of active and independent citizenry so central to Mitchel's vision of

the ideal society. He valorized the Boers as sturdy, hard-working, proud, independent,

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[21] Maume, *The Long Gestation*, 6-7. Maume describes Griffith as the last spokesman of a "class of urban artisans, [that had been] formed by a producerist ethos, centred around pride in skills which marked them out from the unskilled, made them relatively independent of the patronage and dependence relationships of the establishment, and allowed them to despise the professional and merchant classes as consumerist parasites."

[22] *The United Irishman*, 3 June 1899.

[23] *The Freeman's Journal*, 22 November 1899.

[24] Colum, *Ourselves Alone*, 34-35; Donal McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2003), 117. First published as *The Irish Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town: Perskor Publishers, 1989).

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and pious, and he "came to hero worship Paul Kruger," the Boer president.[25] He believed

the wellspring for all these higher attainments and traits was the Boer's strong sense of

national identity. The greatest threat to Boer political sovereignty, and consequently to

the Boer way of life, he felt came from British imperialism and its corollaries,

cosmopolitan capitalism and political liberalism. The same struggle Mitchel saw in the

United States, between traditional society and destructive modernity, Griffith saw in the

Transvaal. The common denominator was political and economic liberalism.

Griffith returned to Dublin in late 1898, and together with William Rooney, he

began the *United Irishman*, the first issue of which was published on 4 March 1899. The

paper's appearance marked the beginning of Griffith's twenty-year campaign against the

"three-headed hydra of Westminsterism, West Britonism, and Imperialism."[26] Its title

was a reference both to John Mitchel's short-lived 1840s paper of the same name, and to

the United Irishman rebellion of 1798. The paper's approach to Irish nationalism was

explicitly anti-imperial. The very first editorial declared the *United Irishman*'s

commitment to making Grattan's "Live Ireland, Perish the Empire" the very "watchword

of patriotism."[27] Declaring "Ireland and the Empire [were] incompatible," the paper

warned readers that one could not "be an African 'civiliser' and an Irish nationalist," for

one could not "trample on the rights of other people and consistently demand [one's]

own."[28] Reflecting Griffith's own dichotomy, the *United Irishman* was a mouthpiece for

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[25] Carlton Younger, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), 11.
[26] Lyons, *Some Recollections of Griffith*, 47.
[27] *The United Irishman*, 4 March 1899.
[28] Ibid.

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both the Dublin artisan class and for bourgeois revivalists (Yeats and Gogarty were

contributors). Although it never achieved a very large circulation, Griffith's paper had an

impact on nationalist discourse far out of proportion to its size.[29]

Much of the funding for the *United Irishman* came from Maud Gonne. Gonne

was to have many different nationalist incarnations, although arguably, none of her

subsequent political and cultural activities was as significant as her support of Griffith

and his newspaper in this period. She had first met him through the Celtic Literary

Society, a group she could not officially join as its rules excluded women. Not to be

discouraged, Gonne began holding cultural salons at her home, and it was through her

that James Connolly, John O'Leary, Arthur Griffith, W.B. Yeats, and other future pro-

Boer activists came into regular contact. She was the daughter of a British army officer

who, she claimed, had been a Home Ruler. As such, Gonne said, he "wished Ireland to

remain united with England – a part of her Empire." She, on the other hand, professed

herself a convinced separatist.[30]

Gonne very much wanted to be part of the unfolding nationalist drama in the

1890s, and she was particularly drawn to the romantic nationalist figure of John O'Leary

whom she had first met in 1886.[31] Her ability to get to the center of the nationalist *avant*

garde was a testament to Gonne's own persistence and resourcefulness as much as to her

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[29] Griffith and the *United Irishman* are mentioned several times in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, evidence of their prominent place in Dublin's political culture. See Daniel Mulhall, "The Age of *Ulysses:* James Joyce's Portrait of Early Twentieth-Century Ireland," *History Ireland* 12, no. 2 (2004): 34-39.
[30] *The United Irishman*, 20 October 1900.
[31] Gonne, *Autobiography*, 89; Samuel Levenson, *Maud Gonne* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976), 45. O'Leary and his sister Ellen provided an introduction for her to the poet nationalist W.B. Yeats, for whom she famously became a muse/object of obsession.

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finances. In July of 1900 she organized a very successful "Patriotic Children's Treat" for 20,000 children in Dublin's Clonturk Park. The event was in response to similar children's picnics that the visiting Queen Victoria had held in the Phoenix Park, except that only those who had turned down Victoria's treats were invited to Gonne's event.[32] Praising Gonne's effort, James Connolly said it had demonstrated to "the world that British Imperialism [had] cast no glamour over" the "young minds" of Ireland.[33] Indeed, Gonne frequently contributed articles to the *United Irishman* in which she displayed a particularly passionate belief in the paper's Mitchelite crusade against the commercialism and cosmopolitanism of empire. The nationalist struggle she said, "was a struggle for the noble and heroic ideal which Ireland represent[ed], standing as she [did] in opposition to the ugliness of materialism and fraud whose visible symbol in this world [was] the British Empire."[34]

Gonne's rhetoric too was modeled on that of Mitchel and as if to prove her own nationalist credentials, her polemics were often highly inflammatory. She denounced the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1897 for not having made "sufficiently evident" that Ireland wanted nothing to do with Britain's imperial project.[35] She contrasted the alleged cynicism and complacency of Irish MPs with the exuberant nationalism of those in her own circle, whom she described as being "drunk on ideals." She predicted that it would

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[32] Gonne, *Autobiography*, 269; Janette Condon, "The Patriotic Children's Treat: Irish Nationalism and Children's Culture at the Twilight of Empire," *Irish Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (2000): 167-178.
[33] *The Worker's Republic*, 7 July 1900.
[34] Maud Gonne, *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings: 1895-1946*, ed. Karen Steele (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 102-103.
[35] Gonne, *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings*, 45.

be "those idealists who [would] one day trample down the British Empire."[36] Arguably

the most idealistic of Gonne's associates was not Arthur Griffith, but James Connolly.

Gonne and Connolly had first come into contact in 1896, and together they laid the

organizational groundwork for what would become the Irish Transvaal Committee.

Although she was not a Socialist (neither was Griffith or O'Leary), she shared with

Connolly a bitter hatred of British imperialism.

James Connolly was born in Scotland in 1868 and raised in the poverty of an

Edinburgh slum. He joined the British Army at the age of fourteen and served for seven

years (during some of which time he was posted in Ireland).[37] He deserted in 1889 and

followed his brother into labor politics, becoming an organizer for the Scottish Socialist

Federation. Unemployed in 1896, Connolly accepted a job with the Dublin Socialist

Club, and he and his young family moved to Ireland.[38] He changed the club's name to

the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) and he began to chart a political program in

which the destruction of the British Empire was an open, if initially secondary, objective.

The goal of the ISRP he said was to "muster all the forces of labor for a revolutionary

reconstruction of society and the incidental destruction of the British Empire."[39]

Connolly edited the party's newspaper, The Worker's Republic, which first appeared on

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[36] Gonne, Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 102.

[37] Carl Reeve & Ann Barton Reeve, James Connolly and the United States, The Road to the 1916 Irish Rebellion (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 10. He later claimed his enlistment was inspired by the example of John Boyle O'Reilly. O'Reilly (subsequently the editor of the Boston Pilot) had operated as a Fenian recruiter during his time in the British army.

[38] Samuel Levenson, James Connolly, A Biography (London: Martin, Brian, & O'Keefe, 1973), 43.

[39] James Connolly, Selected Political Writings eds. Dudley Edwards and Ransom (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 167. The use of "incidental" here points to inherent differences between Connolly's and Griffith's anti-imperialism – differences that would become significant after the war. See below.

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14 August 1898. The paper did not limit his criticism of empire to just that of the British: "Oppression and fraud –whether they [were] done under Saxon or Celtic, Slavonic or Arabic auspices – remain oppression and fraud."[40] Capitalism was an international phenomenon and empire was simply a manifestation of its voracious appetite for labor and markets.[41]

One of Connolly's first anti-imperial demonstrations took place during Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebration in June 1897. He led a mock funeral procession through the streets of Dublin, at the head of which was borne a coffin inscribed with the words, "The British Empire." The parade was intercepted by the constabulary, but before they could reach Connolly, he pushed the coffin off O'Connell Bridge and into the River Liffey, declaring as he did so, "Here Goes the Coffin of the British Empire ... to Hell with the British Empire!"[42] He was arrested and held overnight only to have his fine paid by a delighted Maud Gonne. Writing to Connolly afterwards, she praised him for having "saved Dublin from the humiliation of an English jubilee without a public meeting of protestation."[43] It would not be the last time they would take their anti-imperial message to the streets of the capital.

[40] *The Worker's Republic*, 15 October 1898.
[41] *The Worker's Republic*, 20 August 1898, 3 September 1898, 10 September 1898, 1 July 1899.
[42] Samuel Levenson, *Maud Gonne* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976), 119-120.
[43] Cited in Levenson, *James Connolly*, 53.

II – Nationalist Attitudes toward the War

The outbreak of the South African War in October 1899 created a sensation in

Ireland. Nationalists were overwhelmingly on the side of the Transvaal Boers, whom

they were inclined to see as like themselves, a nation of farmers striving for

independence from British imperial tyranny.[44] The Dutch people of the Transvaal were

depicted as uncontaminated by the sordid worldliness and materialism believed endemic

to modern industrial society. Michael Davitt told readers that the Boer was pious,

independent, and proud, all qualities that stemmed from his being "a land-owning

democrat," and from his having a "conscious lordship of the soil."[45] James Connolly did

not identify the Boer's relationship to the land as the source of his nobility and strength;

rather he said, the Boers "being men economically free ... still had those sterling qualities

of manhood which [made] the fighting possible and effective."[46]

A letter to the *Freeman's Journal* noted with approval the near unanimity of

nationalist newspapers in support of the Boers.[47] This support was not a new

phenomenon as many in Ireland had cheered the Boers during the First South African

War in the early 1880s. In 1896, the *Freeman's Journal* lambasted the British for

sponsoring the "ludicrous fiasco" known as the Jameson Raid. The Dutch people of the

Transvaal, it warned, were "not savages," and could not be frightened or bullied into

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[44] Donal P. McCracken, *The Irish Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Perskor Publishers, 1989), 159.

[45] Michael Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press and Edition Synapse, 2001), 37.

[46] *The Worker's Republic*, 28 October 1899.

[47] McCracken, *The Irish Pro-Boers*, 45.

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surrender.[48] Newspapers three years later cheered the "gallant Boers" or the "gallant

Dutch farmers," who, in a "spectacle of fearlessness and self-control," faced "their doom

with unshrinking eyes."[49] The "little Transvaal Republic [had] the bearing of a hero," the

Irish People declared, while the "Empire the sun never [rested] upon" was behaving like

"a hulking bully in a cold-sweat of cowardice."[50] Dissenting voices were quickly

identified and pilloried for their inconsistency in not defending the Transvaal

"nationalists." The *Irish People,* noting the anti-Boer tone of one paper, found it

"incredible that any Irish paper professing Nationalist principles, no matter of what

variety ... should openly ... [denounce] the magnificent South African Dutchmen."[51]

The British government ostensibly went to war in response to Boer refusals to

enfranchise the Transvaal's white Uitlander population.[52] The initial Irish nationalist

response to the war's outbreak was to dismiss this as an empty pretense designed to cover

up Britain's pact with Rand capitalists and gold-mining magnates. Irish nationalists

shared the belief, widespread at the time, that the war had been orchestrated on behalf of

a cabal of international financiers. James Connolly dismissed the Uitlanders as an

"unscrupulous gang of capitalists" who had convinced "a government of financiers" to

wage war "upon a nation of farmers."[53] Such an argument in the late nineteenth century

could easily shade into anti-Semitism, and this was reflected in Irish nationalist discourse

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[48] *The Freeman's Journal,* 3 January 1896.
[49] *The United Irishman,* 17 June 1899; *The Irish People,* 23 September and 14 October 1899.
[50] *The Irish People,* 14 October 1899.
[51] *The Irish People,* 14 October 1899.
[52] Uitlander was the term for a member of the foreign-born white population of the Transvaal (mostly Britons who had come to work in the mining industry).
[53] *The Worker's Republic,* 19 August 1899.

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both in Ireland and in the United States. Earlier in the nineteenth century John Mitchel

was notorious even among contemporaries for his anti-Semitic views, and in the 1880s,

Patrick Ford's *Irish World* defined itself in terms of a crusade against "shylock"

exploiters of the working class. The paper regularly ran the phrase "Usury is Theft"

beneath its masthead.[54] Mitchel and Ford typify a particular kind of Irish nationalism in

which radical and reactionary beliefs existed side-by-side. If anything, however, this

composite ideology produced a more multi-faceted and entrenched anti-Semitism than

that associated with either ideological camp on its own. For many radicals, Jews were

associated with exploitative international capitalism and with usury (on a local level).

Among reactionaries, Jews represented a cosmopolitanism and modernity believed

inherently destructive to traditional values. Irish nationalist anti-Semitism during the

South African War reflected both these positions.

The mere suggestion that the war was linked to cosmopolitan capitalism was

enough to send Frank Hugh O'Donnell into a frenzy of paranoid anti-Semitism. When

the Boers failed to secure official backing from any of the Continental powers, for

example, O'Donnell declared that an "Anglo-Jewish Conspiracy, working in combination

with the Huguenots and the Freemasons" had concocted "an infamous plan which,

besides assailing Catholic Religion" aimed to prevent Germany from joining the war on

the side the Boers.[55] Arthur Griffith's anti-Semitism did not reach the hysterical

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[54] See Sabina Taylor, "Patrick Ford and His Pursuit of Social Justice."
[55] *The United Irishman*, 11 November 1899. Patrick Maume points out that many of the *United Irishman*'s most outrageous anti-Semitic tirades were written by O'Donnell, a frequent contributor to the paper from inception until June 1900. Maume, *Long Gestation*, 52.

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crescendo of O'Donnell's, although he too portrayed Jews as at the heart of a global

commercial conspiracy. "Nine-tenths" of Jews were, he said, "usurers and parasites of

industry." Notably, however, he excluded from this category "the Zionist minority ... the

patriotic men who desire to reconstruct the Hebrew nation, and who feel bitterly the

humiliation of their race through the sordid pursuit of gold by the majority."[56]

Claiming first-hand knowledge of South African affairs, Griffith assured his

readers that the vast majority of Uitlanders were loyal and happy supporters of the Boer

regime. The few malcontents were members of "the British capitalistic class and the

loafers and rowdies of Johannesburg."[57] Never before, the Freeman's Journal argued,

had "any nation claimed for its subjects in a foreign state the right to participate in its

government."[58] Michael Davitt rejected British concern for Uitlanders as a "transparent

hypocrisy" and a blatant attempt by Britain "to disguise its purely predatory purposes in

the garb of a 'war for liberty.'"[59] Davitt acknowledged that the Boers used religious tests

to exclude Catholics and other religions from participation in government. This "narrow

and reactionary restriction" was unfortunate, he said, not least because it meant that there

was a "modicum of fact and of foundation at the bottom of the Uitlander charges." He

accepted that the Transvaal "was far from being an ideal Commonwealth," but he asked

his readers to bear in mind the "religious and social history" of the Boers, and he

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[56] The United Irishman, 23 April 1904. The number of Jews in Ireland remained small throughout the nineteenth century. There was, however, a violent anti-Semitic outburst in Limerick in 1904 (incited by a parish priest named Fr. Creagh). Michael Davitt and the Socialist Frederick Ryan were among those who denounced Griffith's paper for condoning the attacks on Jewish businesses. See also, The United Irishman, 23 Jan 1904 and 28 May 1904
[57] The United Irishman, 26 March 1899.
[58] The Freeman's Journal, 11 October 1899.
[59] Letter to the Freeman's Journal, 31 October 1899.

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reminded them that the British constitution barred Catholics from the throne. He

contended, moreover, that under President Kruger, the Transvaal had "surely, if slowly,

[been] adapting its laws and institutions to the needs and rights of its new population."[60]

Davitt was referring to the "new" white population and his *The Boer Fight For*

Freedom makes little mention of the plight of black Africans.[61] Like many in Ireland, he

dismissed as mere propaganda Britain's claims to be acting on behalf of South Africa's

indigenous people. It is now accepted that the British government more or less

abandoned South Africa's blacks after the war, but this does not mean that everyone at

the time who raised the question of black oppression was necessarily disingenuous.

While Joseph Chamberlain and Alfred Milner almost certainly had no intention of putting

black Africans on an equal footing with whites, others in Britain truly believed the

government was motivated by a desire to rescue blacks from Boer oppression, and they

supported the war on these grounds.[62] Nationalists in Ireland, however, were not so

easily convinced of either Boer misdeeds or British magnanimity. Arthur Griffith

referred to black South Africans as the "unfortunate kaffirs" or the "unfortunate natives,"

but he denied the Boers treated them inhumanely. The British "standard-bearers of

civilisation," on the other hand, taught the native "the Bible ... taught him that he was a

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[60] Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom*, 17-21.

[61] Nor does he address the question as to why many black South Africans, both before and after the war, expressed the belief that British rule was preferable to Boer rule. Christopher Saunders, "African Attitudes to Britain and the Empire before and after the South Africa War," in *The South African War Reappraised* ed. Donal Lowry (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 143.

[62] Suffragists Millicent Fawcett and Josephine Butler angered some of their colleagues by supporting the war. Their support was based on the belief that Britain was committed to creating a new South Africa in which blacks would have equal rights with whites. Zine Magubane, *Bring the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 120-21.

man and a brother and [then] treated him like a dog."[63] James Connolly, while generally more inclined to express sympathy with non-white natives of Africa and Asia, nonetheless still stood firmly behind the "unoffending" Boers, and he did not address their treatment of South Africa's black population.[64] The nearest Michael Davitt comes in his book to even acknowledging the existence of the Transvaal's black population is his discussion of the city of Johannesburg, where he said, "eighty thousand savages were kept under orderly control without undue severity, and made subject to civilized law and customs in a manner [that reflected] the highest credit upon the police."[65]

Typically, accusations of racial oppression against the Boers were dismissed as unverifiable, and, in any case, hypocritical, given the British tradition of misdeeds against native populations. Alfred Webb, a Quaker and fierce opponent of slavery, declared himself wholly in support of the Boers, whose "treatment of the natives [had] been no worse than the British."[66] Most nationalist newspapers simply did not address the question of South Africa's indigenous population. The *Irish People*, consequently, saw no irony in declaring the Boers "the champions of Human Liberty," and the *Freeman's Journal* looked forward to the "glorious establishment" of a new America in South Africa, which it believed would become a "home of freedom and encouragement to all

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[63] *The United Irishman*, 26 March 1899 and 11 November 1899.
[64] *The Worker's Republic*, 4 November 1899.
[65] Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom*, 12.
[66] Alfred Webb to the *Freeman's Journal*, 17 October 1899.

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oppressed peoples throughout the world." "Is it Yorktown?" a hopeful headline read

after the Boers seemed poised to take Ladysmith.[67]

Those advanced nationalists who saw British humanitarianism as a contradiction

in terms might be expected to be somewhat cynical about Britain's intentions toward

African blacks. This, however, did not necessarily preclude nationalists from

condemning Boer oppression of the native population. Both Davitt and Griffith went to

South Africa and saw for themselves that blacks, unlike the Uitlanders, did not even meet

the description of second-class citizens. Both men, however, seem to have concluded

that the denial of Boer nationality and sovereignty was a more odious wrong than the

denial of black equality. In subscribing to notions of racial hierarchy, they were quite

typical of their time, although not completely so, for there was an alternative discourse on

the war in which the plight of South Africa's indigenous people was central. Elsewhere,

public figures like H.H. Hyndman and Rosa Luxemberg had loudly condemned the war

as blatant imperialism. Notably, however, they also condemned Boer treatment of

blacks, and they argued that Dutch settlers had no more right to be in the Transvaal than

had the British.[68]

Davitt's failure to acknowledge Boer injustice against black Africans does not

diminish his advocacy on behalf of Irish peasants, British working people, Russian Jews,

and New Zealand Maoris, but it does suggest that his nationalism could sometimes

silence his better instincts. In Arthur Griffith's case, as in that of many of his nationalist

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[67] *The Irish People*, 14 October 1899; *The Freeman's Journal*, 1 November 1899 and 3 November 1899.
[68] Donal Lowry, "The Boers were the Beginning of the End?: The Wider Impact of the South African War," in *The South African War Reappraised* ed. Donal Lowry (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 211.

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contemporaries, the extent to which a people was considered "civilized" was directly

proportional to their level of national consciousness, and the degree to which they had

subsequently organized on this basis. The native population simply did not figure into

his assessment of the Transvaal because he viewed them as part of a pan-African racial

grouping rather than as members of a specific nation. In a worldview where nationality

was seen as the guarantor of all facets of life, they, like the Jews, were doomed to

irrelevance and ultimately, extinction.[69] Indians, Egyptians, and Filipinos on the other

hand, were generally described in more favorable terms, largely because their respective

resistance movements were viewed as part of a coordinated "nationalist" response to

imperialism, as opposed to an instinctive reaction to territorial encroachment. Griffith's

anti-imperialism was not, as is often our contemporary understanding of the term, an

ideology founded necessarily on assumptions of individual and racial equality.

Imperialism was a denial of national right and an infringement upon collective national

identity. Consequently, if one was not nationalized, one could not be a victim of

imperialism (though one might still be a victim of injustice or inhumanity).[70]

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[69] Maume, *Long Gestation*, 52.
[70] This position was sustained by the contemporary ignorance concerning the true nature of black African societies and the variety of collective identities among Africa's different peoples.

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III – Mobilization Against the War

On 2 September 1899 the *United Irishman* reported that the previous Sunday had

seen an "abnormally large" outdoor meeting held in Dublin. The meeting was a protest

"against the plundering and aggressive policy of England in regard to the Transvaal

Republic."[71] Believing war in South Africa to be a foregone conclusion, Connolly's

ISRP organized the protest as a means to "demonstrate to the world at large that [the

Irish] were opposed to all oppression, and that they would always sympathise with the

people fighting against it, whether they be Indians or Boers."[72] Although Maud Gonne

had not attended the meeting, a letter of support from her was read out by the Chairman.

Gonne did appear on the platform a month later, on 1 October 1899, in what would be

one of the largest Irish demonstrations to take place against the war. The *Irish People*

estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 people attended the meeting in Dublin's

Beresford Place. The paper doubted whether "any other city in the world could give

expression to the view of its people so spontaneously and decisively on a question of

such vast importance."[73] Besides Gonne, the crowd heard speeches from John O'Leary

and Michael Davitt. The following weekend, the leaders of the Beresford Place

demonstration founded the Irish Transvaal Committee in the hopes of focusing Irish

opinion into an even more pro-Boer mould.

The first meeting of the Irish Transvaal Committee was held on the 7 October

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[71] *The United Irishman*, 2 September 1899.
[72] *The United Irishman*, 2 September 1899.
[73] *The Irish People*, 7 October 1899.

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1899 in the Lower Abbey Street rooms of the Celtic Literary Society. The membership

of the two organizations largely overlapped. John O'Leary was elected the first

president, but the driving forces behind its activity would be Griffith, Gonne, and

Connolly. Although essentially a Dublin organization, smaller branches of the

Committee were established in other towns.[74] The Dublin branch's last official meeting

was in March 1900, a mere five months after its inception.[75] In its short existence,

however, it provided a focal point for Irish pro-Boer activists. Hundreds of Irish social

and civic bodies voted measures of sympathy to the Boers, but there was no other

organization that had as its explicit function, the promotion of the Boer cause.[76] The

committee was open to both men and women and its members included parliamentarians

(Michael Davitt and William Redmond), Socialists (Connolly and Frederick Ryan), and

bourgeois figures like Gonne and Yeats.

The first few weeks of the Transvaal Committee's existence were filled with

activity. Besides passing resolutions in favor of the Boers, translating the Boer anthem

into Irish, and raising funds for an Irish ambulance corps, Committee members spoke

frequently at the meetings of other sympathetic organizations. They also designed a flag

for the Irish Transvaal Brigade, a group of several hundred mostly Irish-American men

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[74] *The United Irishman*, 16 December 1899.

[75] Donal McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade: Irish Commandos in the Anglo-Boer War* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1999), 71.

[76] At the height of pro-Boer fever in December 1899, Limerick City Council voted the freedom of the city to both the Boer President Paul Kruger as well as to Maud Gonne. Many other civic and sporting bodies voted similar measures. See McMahon, "Ireland, the Empire, and the Commonwealth," 194; also Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 448.

who fought alongside the Boers in 1899-1900.[77] Any organization claiming to be

nationalist was more or less expected to issue a resolution condemning the war.

Connolly had long been at odds with Dublin Corporation, and he blasted the body for its

conspicuous failure to vote a measure of sympathy to the Boers.[78] Several weeks after

the war's outbreak, and after a number of British military setbacks, it was announced that

the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, was to visit Dublin in order to receive an

honorary degree from Trinity College. News of the impending visit met with virtually

unanimous nationalist disapproval. The *Irish People* was incensed that the "blood-guilty

author of the attack" on the Transvaal had the audacity to come to Ireland to "deliver a

Jingo tirade" designed to drum up support for war. The paper hoped Dubliners would

turn out for the Irish Transvaal Committee's rally (scheduled for the next day) in order to

demonstrate to Mr. Chamberlain that theirs was a "Nationalist city."[79]

Dublin Castle proscribed the 17 December demonstration at the last moment, and

a somewhat apologetic policeman awakened Gonne in the middle of the night to warn

that she and the other Transvaal Committee members would be arrested should they

attempt to go ahead with the meeting.[80] The action virtually assured that they would.

The following morning O'Leary, Griffith, Gonne, and Connolly set off in a hired carriage

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[77] The flag was unveiled by Maud Gonne on the anniversary of Thomas Davis. See *The United Irishman*, 28 October 1899. For the Boer national anthem in Irish, see *The United Irishman* 23 December 1899. For list of subscribers to the Boer Ambulance campaign see *The United Irishman*, 16 December 1899. The Transvaal Brigade was led by John Blake, John McBride, and Arthur Lynch.

[78] *The Worker's Republic*, 16 December 1899. Dublin Corporation is the elected civic government of the city. Individual Corporation members (councilors) usually identified themselves as Unionist or Nationalist in sympathy.

[79] *The Irish People*, 16 December 1899.

[80] Gonne, *Autobiography*, 271-72.

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toward Beresford Place. Finding their way blocked by the police, Connolly seized the

reins and drove the cab through the barricades. O'Leary and the others were forced to

abbreviate their speeches and to address the large gathering from the carriage, a fact that

only heightened the crowd's excitement.[81] Each time the mounted police baton-charged

their way through the crowd to the speakers, Connolly drove the mobile platform on

further. The affair was "one of the most violent scenes Dublin had witnessed in a

generation."[82] The demonstration was nonetheless a triumph for the Transvaal

Committee as well as a very spirited public display of Irish pro-Boer feeling. A jubilant

United Irishman declared that Dublin Castle had been unable to prevent "Ireland's

Capital from proclaiming to the nations its sympathy with the enemies of the British

Empire and its passionate longing for that Empire's downfall."[83]

Its audaciousness was a part of the Irish Transvaal Committee's popular appeal,

but it would be a mistake to dismiss the group's efforts as empty theatrics. The

Committee spearheaded an aggressive anti-enlistment campaign, which Dublin

Metropolitan Police, if not the British Government, certainly took seriously.[84] Both

Gonne and Connolly had addressed the question of recruitment before the war ever

began. Connolly warned that an Irishman in the service of the Empire was little more

than a "hired assassin," for regardless of "whether it be Egyptians revolting against

oppression, Boers defending their independence, Indians maddened with famine, or

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[81] *The Worker's Republic*, 30 December 1899.
[82] McCracken, *Irish Pro-Boers*, 66; Gonne, *Autobiography*, 277.
[83] *The United Irishman*, 23 December 1899.
[84] *The United Irishman*, 24 March 1900. The paper claimed the Transvaal Committee's leaders had been "shadowed" by the police for six months.

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Irishmen hungering for freedom ... the soldier [had] no option but to press the trigger."[85]

Given, Maud Gonne said, that the British Empire had been a "monstrous symbol of tyranny and oppression" throughout the world, it would always be "a shame to [Ireland] to remember how many battles Irish valour" had won for that Empire.[86]

After the outbreak of war, the Irish Transvaal Committee made opposition to British army recruiting its top priority. In October of 1899, the Committee distributed 25,000 handbills and 2000 posters in an attempt to discourage young Irishmen from enlisting in the army.[87] Although it would later tone down its condemnation, the *United Irishman* initially denounced enlisters in the strongest possible terms. It declared that the "Irishman who [enlisted] in the British army [was] a traitor to his country." The moment he lifted his hands "at England's bidding, against a people struggling to defend their country ... [he earned] the contempt and loathing of the Irish race."[88] The paper sought to clear up any misconceptions Irishmen might have about the benefits of a military career.[89] Maud Gonne claimed to have interviewed former British soldiers, now consigned by poverty and disability to the North Dublin Union (a workhouse). It was too late for them, she said, "the blood-stained hand of England [had] marked them with her

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[85] *The Worker's Republic*, 15 July 1899.

[86] *The Worker's Republic*, 24 September 1898.

[87] McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade*, 71.

[88] *The United Irishman*, 21 October 1899 and 28 October 1899.

[89] Not everyone was prepared to issue blanket condemnations of Irishmen serving in the British military, however. John O'Leary was among those who chided Griffith's paper for its disregard for the pressures facing impoverished Irishmen. *The United Irishman*, 6 October 1899; Donal Lowry, "Nationalist and Unionist Responses to the British empire in the Age of the South African War, 1899-1902," in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 173. Lowry suggests that nationalist support for the Boers, while widespread, was not unanimous; *The United Irishman*, 28 October 1899 and 4 December 1899.

colour." They "had fought England's battles for her [and] extended the crime of her

Empire," only to be rewarded with a paltry pension of sixpence a day, and that only for

twelve months.[90] The *Irish People* was more restrained, but it warned that the "evil and

dangerous work" in South Africa would "be left mainly to the Irish and Scotch," rather

than to the "stunted Cockneys, the dull Hodges, the stupid yokels from Somerset," whom

the British could not "trust against fighters like the Boers."[91] The *Freeman's Journal*

similarly predicted that "another Irish holocaust" was about to be "paid at the shrine of

British Jingoism."[92]

Maud Gonne was anxious to take concrete action sooner rather than later. She

traveled to Brussels in order to meet with Dr. Leyds, the Boer representative on the

Continent. She and her colleagues, she suggested, were willing to blow up a British troop

ship if given the go-ahead. Leyds responded that this would harm Boer relations with

their European allies, as it would be perceived as an "un-recognised means of warfare."[93]

Sometime thereafter, Leyds' office sent Arthur Griffith a letter in which it was requested

that he prevail upon "Miss Gonne to cease sending telegrams and paying visits to our

chancelleries and consulates." While the Boer Government very much appreciated Irish

support, it could not be seen to be abusing the hospitality of neutral nations "by entering

into relations with the indiscreet advocates of insurrection in Ireland or elsewhere."[94]

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[90] *The United Irishman*, 21 October 1899.
[91] *The Irish People*, 30 September 1899 and 9 December 1899.
[92] *The Freeman's Journal*, 26 February 1900.
[93] Gonne, *Autobiography*, 282-83.
[94] Chancellerie de la Republique Sud-Africaine to Arthur Griffith, 20 January (no year). Cited in McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade*, 80-81. Gonne claimed her plan was foiled because someone had discredited her to Leyds. McCracken blames Frank Hugh O'Donnell, who he says, was both an IRB spy

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Gonne had to limit herself to campaigning against recruiting.

It is not clear whether the Transvaal Committee's anti-enlistment campaign had, as Gonne and Griffith maintained, a measurable negative effect on British recruiting in Ireland.[95] The indications are that it did not, or at least that not to the extent was claimed.[96] Nonetheless, Keith Jeffery has argued that that while it is impossible to prove that "specific shifts in the rate of recruitment can be ascribed to the activities of particular groups," it would be "unwise to argue that the growth of separatist nationalism" during and after the war "had no effect on recruitment."[97] If nothing else, the anti-recruitment drive revisited Thomas Davis's argument (in response to Britain's war in Afghanistan) that the Irishman had more in common with the colonized than with the colonizer. Moreover, even if the Irish Transvaal Committee did not undermine the British war effort to any great extent, it certainly contributed toward Irish popular hostility to British imperialism in general.

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and a Boer Agent. True or not, Griffith fired O'Donnell and apologized for ever having given him column space. *United Irishman*, 30 June 1900. O'Donnell's clumsy and hypocritical attempt to re-ingratiate himself with the Irish Party was also a factor in the split between the two. (Maume, *Long Gestation*, 52).

[95] *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901. The paper claimed that the ITC, acting virtually alone, had "foiled" the "plot" to send 30,000 Irishmen to fight in South Africa. Another story claimed the actions of the ITC had reduced the number of Irish enlistees by over twenty five percent. *United Irishman*, 29 June 1901.

[96] McCracken, *Irish Pro-Boers*, 120; "McMahon, Ireland, the Empire and the Commonwealth," 193-94.

[97] Jeffery, "The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire," 97, 100.

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IV – The War and Irish Nationalism

The South African War strengthened radical nationalists' appreciation of the broad popular appeal of anti-imperialism, just as the "empire question" provided them a compelling issue with which to hold constitutionalists to account for the gap between their revolutionary rhetoric and their much more conservative politics. If it provided little practical support to the Boers, the Irish Transvaal Committee had a nonetheless significant impact on Irish nationalist politics. Arthur Griffith would use the Committee as a springboard for his campaign against the Irish Parliamentary Party. The Irish Party's position on empire was restricted by its alliance with the Liberals, and even when in opposition, its leaders had relatively little room for maneuver. Home Rule's critics, however, were not inclined to make allowances for this, and, indeed, the party's dependence on the goodwill of British politicians was deemed further evidence of its impotency. Just as Isaac Butt had failed the imperial litmus test in 1877, so in the early twentieth century would his Irish party successors find themselves accused of complacency, and even complicity, in regard to British imperialism.

From the earliest days of the war, competing elements within Irish nationalism vied to establish themselves as the authentic voice of Irish pro-Boerism. Parliamentarians pointed to the Irish Party's record of using its position in Westminster to criticize British policy in South Africa and elsewhere.[98] While it is true that the party had

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[98] Terence Denman, *A Lonely Grave: The Life and Death of William Redmond* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), 56-59; F.S.L Lyons, *John Dillon, A Biography* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1968),

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consistently expressed sympathy with the Boers, this support, as Arthur Griffith argued,

was not necessarily based on antipathy to the concept of empire. In fact, some members,

the Parnellite leader John Redmond in particular, had begun to back away from

generalized denunciations of the Empire itself.[99] He told an 1895 gathering of Cambridge

undergraduates that "the Home Rule demand ... was not a demand for separation," but

rather, on the contrary, "a demand for a federal Union, one of the essential constituents of

which was the preservation of the unity and integrity of the Empire." Redmond added

that, "separation from England" was "undesirable and impossible."[100] In addition, while

the *Irish Independent*, the leading Parnellite newspaper in the 1890s, was supportive of

the Boer cause, its position on imperialism in general was compromised by its ties to the

Parnellite MP for West Clare, James Rochfort Maguire, associate of Cecil Rhodes, and

one of the paper's financial backers.[101] To a certain extent, the Irish Party's more

circumspect tone on imperialism reflected a growing belief among elite nationalists that a

complete break with the Empire would be damaging for Ireland, particularly

economically.[102] It also reflected a shift toward imperialism in British politics. The

Liberal Party had split over the South African War, and Gladstone, not long dead and

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[99] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 434; McCracken, *The Irish Pro-Boers 1877-1902*, 38; McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade*, 75. McCracken nonetheless notes the "sterling service" of the party to the Boer cause, service he says went beyond that of the British Radicals.

[100] *The Independent*, 27 February 1895. Reprinted in the *United Irishman*, 19 October 1901.

[101] Patrick Maume, "The *Irish Independent* and Empire, 1891-1919," in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 131. Maume says Rochfort Maguire was widely known to have played a "discreditable" role in Cecil Rhodes' dealings with Lobengula, King of Matebeleland.

[102] Senia Paseta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland's Catholic Elite, 1879-1922* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 129.

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formerly beyond reproach, now came under attack from his old colleague Lord Rosebery. The Liberals, if they were to survive, Rosebery said, had to accept that imperialism was the new international reality, and that Britain's fate was tied to that of her "free and beneficent Empire." [103] Back in Ireland, the *Freeman's Journal* pondered how different this new "Imperialist Liberalism" was from Gladstone's "old Liberal doctrine of national right." [104] The Irish Party allied with the anti-war Liberal camp, although its critics were not inclined to give it much credit for this choice.

In late October, a few weeks after the war began, Michael Davitt famously resigned his parliamentary seat in protest at the war, telling the House that he had reached the conclusion that "no cause, however just, [would] find support, no wrong, however pressing or apparent, [would] find redress [in Westminster], unless backed up by force." [105] Frustrated at the increasingly imperial mood in the Commons, he was also disappointed that the Irish Party had not made more of the war. He told Alfred Webb that his party colleagues were "not in earnest" and that, as a consequence of their petty divisions, they had failed to make their presence felt during the war sessions. The "insincerity of degenerate Nationalists," he said, had facilitated the British in their "monstrous crime" against the Boers, and had damaged "the whole Irish cause before the world." [106] The *Freeman's Journal* noted the poor showing among Irish MPs at the war

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[103] Rosebery laid out the challenge before the Liberals in a letter published in *The Times*, 17 July 1901.
[104] *The Freeman's Journal*, 12 October 1899.
[105] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. 77, c. 622, 25 October 1899.
[106] Michael Davitt to Alfred Webb, 30 October 1899, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9490, f. 4962. Quoted in McNeil, 414.

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sessions, and lamented the "isolation" of Davitt and Dillon in their "manly opposition to the iniquitous war."[107]

Davitt's dramatic resignation nonetheless temporarily boosted the party's profile, and provided an opportunity for some stirring rhetoric (mostly by John Dillon) on behalf of the Boers.[108] In the context of Irish politics, however, his resignation strengthened the extremist position that constitutionalism was ultimately pointless.[109] His decision to quit Westminster, of course, also created the suggestion that those Irish MPs who did not resign their seats were quite happy to limit their activism to harmless speechifying in London. Connolly's *Worker's Republic* contrasted Davitt's "manly action" with the "cowardly conduct of the majority of the Home Rule members."[110] Indeed, within days of the resignation, the Transvaal Committee asked those parliamentarians who had not been present for the war session to publicly account for their absence. It had, it said, "perceived with profound regret the large number of Irish members" whose absence from the war vote had "left the views of the Irish people liable to be misrepresented," and it wished therefore to "respectfully invite" the absent members to communicate to the Committee what their votes would have been, had they been present.[111]

Even before the war had broken out, the *United Irishman* and the *Worker's Republic* were critical of the Parliamentary Party. They made explicit parallels between the politicians of the 1890s and those of the Isaac Butt era. "Instead of the manly,

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[107] *The Freeman's Journal*, 30 October, 1899.
[108] Lyons, *Dillon*, 216-217.
[109] McCracken, *Irish Pro-Boers*, 161.
[110] *The Worker's Republic*, 4 November 1899.
[111] *The United Irishman*, 28 October 1899.

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stubborn independence and hard-hitting of Biggar and Parnell," James Connolly

complained, the current Irish members were reminiscent of the "the time-serving pliancy

of Mr. Butt." He blasted the House of Commons as an "assemblage of blatant

imperialists and posturing hypocrites."[112] Advanced nationalists in fact began openly

calling for an end to the constitutional "experiment." The "manly policy and the wise

one for the Irish Nation" the *United Irishman* said, was to "abandon forever the attitude

of half-bluster and half-whine" called constitutionalism, and instead, to "aid the forces

working for the destruction of the ... Empire."[113] Like Connolly, Griffith believed Home

Rule constitutionalism had fostered a culture of jobbery, corruption, and cynicism, which

reached from the leaders of the Irish Party to the members of Dublin Corporation.

Further, the whole concept of Home Rule was inadequate, and the Irish Party's claim that

"a petty parliament in Dublin would secure for England" Irish support, was deemed

"perfectly ridiculous." Twenty years of parliamentary agitation had brought nothing but

"demoralisation" the paper said, and it was clear that the Party had no strategy other than

to "crave ... alms of [Ireland's] tyrant" by playing the "whining beggar."[114]

For a time in the first weeks of the war, however, it seemed that the Irish

Transvaal Committee might bring parliamentary and advanced nationalists together in a

common cause. This was not to be. The Committee was, from the outset, an uneasy

alliance between Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party, Griffith's Celtic Literary

Society, and a handful of MPs including Davitt, William Redmond, and Pat O'Brien.

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[112] *The Worker's Republic*, 15 October 1898 and 28 October 1899.
[113] *The United Irishman*, 12 August 1899.
[114] *The United Irishman*, 18 November and 30 December 1899.

Connolly was suspicious of these allegedly dissident MPs whom he suspected of going to "great efforts to retrieve their reputations as Nationalists." He cited as proof of the real Irish party position on the Boers, a parliamentary speech in which Pat O'Brien implied that Ireland would have been fully behind Britain's war effort were the Irish to have been granted Home Rule.[115]

Increasingly, Connolly portrayed Arthur Griffith as having had hi-jacked the pro-Boer movement begun by his ISRP. The "extreme section (?) of the non-socialists (sic)," had he said, "seen that the Heavens hadn't fallen" upon the ISRP, and they consequently "plucked up courage to hold an anti-war meeting of their own." And "of course, they had to invite the MPs," with the result that "the nationalist anti-war meeting [on October 1st] was a magnificent success – for the Home Rulers." This, he said, "was just the reverse of what the Transvaal Committee meant to do."[116] The conduct of the parliamentary members during the subsequent protest against Chamberlain's visit to Dublin only added to Connolly's disenchantment with the Transvaal Committee. The demonstration had been proscribed by the authorities and, despite William Redmond having previously urged the public to defy any ban he, along with Davitt and Pat O'Brien, "took refuge in … a drawing room belonging to the Celtic Literary Society," rather than join the other leaders who broke through police barricades.[117] After the demonstration, the MPs

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[115] *The Worker's Republic*, 28 October 1899.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Denman, *A Lonely Grave*, 58; *The Worker's Republic*, 30 December 1899. At the time, Connolly remarked to Gonne that the Committee's MPs were "conspicuous by their absence." According to Gonne's account (written many years later) Davitt's excuse was that his wife was pregnant, and that he consequently could not risk arrest. Gonne, *Autobiography*, 273-74. (Davitt's wife had actually already had her baby: a week earlier the proud father had announced the arrival of the "young Boer" in a letter to William

allegedly sent a request around to all the newspaper offices that they send over reporters.

The result, according to Connolly, was "perhaps as great a farce as was ever enacted."

"They met together, Mr. John O'Leary in the chair, Pat O'Brien on the one side of him,

Davitt and William Redmond on the other, and five reporters facing them; and there they

lashed away for hours at their speeches, nobody but themselves and the reporters in the

room. The heroes. The brave, undaunted heroes!" It was now, he said, up to the Irish

Transvaal Committee's other constituent parties, "all of whom loyally co-operated

together in organizing and leading the demonstration" to "compare notes as to what

should be done with the blustering Home Rulers."[118]

Whether or not Connolly's rather embarrassing charges were a factor, Griffith's

relationship with the MPs quickly broke down, and within a few weeks, the *United*

Irishman was once again vigorously critical of parliamentarians. Writing later, Griffith

denounced as a "lie" claims that constitutional nationalists, Davitt included, had led a

"continued protest against the war." The Irish Transvaal Committee's appeal for support

from the Irish Party had been "treated ... with disdain," he said, and together with the

"reptile press," the party had "bitterly opposed" the Committee and "endeavoured to

obstruct is work." John Redmond had refused to appear at the Beresford Place

demonstration and Irish MPs, "although invited ... refused to attend the [Committee's]

anti-enlistment meetings, or in any way to support them." The attitude of the United Irish

League was no less hostile, he said, and the League's leaders had forbidden the reading at

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O'Brien's wife, Sophie: Davitt to Mrs. O'Brien, 10 December 1899 in William O'Brien Collection, NLI, MS 913).
[118] *The Worker's Republic*, 30 December 1899.

meetings of resolutions condemning enlistment. Davitt and John Dillon, the two MPs

most often credited as anti-imperialists, had been among twelve Irish Party members who

declined an invitation to serve on the Irish Transvaal Committee's executive. With their

"mock Nationalism," and their cautious politics, it was no wonder, Griffith said, that the

constitutionalists had reduced Ireland to a position of "impotency."[119]

While Griffith's claim that the Irish Party made no stand against the war cannot

be sustained, it does seem that many moderates were reluctant to be associated with the

Transvaal Committee, seeing it perhaps as a passing and somewhat disreputable

conglomeration of rabble-rousers and Socialists.[120] One of Connolly's criticisms of

Michael Davitt, indeed, was that his association with Home Rule made him reluctant to

embrace radical Irish politics to the same extent as he had the British variety.[121] He and

Griffith may have taken Davitt's resignation speech to heart and believed that he had

forsaken not only Westminster, but constitutionalism itself. This was not the case,

however, and even before he left for South Africa, it was clear that if Davitt was going to

have any organizational affiliation, it was going to be with the United Irish League, a

moderate group aligned with the Irish Parliamentary Party.

The growing rift between Griffith and the mainstream nationalist movement

became irreparable as a result of the February 1900 by-election in South Mayo. The

contest was to fill the seat left empty by Davitt, now in South Africa. The Transvaal

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[119] *The United Irishman*, 29 June 1901 and 19 October 1901.

[120] Denman, *A Lonely Grave*, 58.

[121] *The Harp*, August 1908. Connolly claimed that Davitt's labor advocacy in England made him the enemy of the aristocracy and the Conservatives, but the same policy in Ireland would have pitted him against the Irish Parliamentary Party and the interests of its bourgeois supporters.

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Committee suggested the name of Major John MacBride, leader of the Irish Transvaal

Brigade, then fighting the British in South Africa. Aside from the fact that Griffith and

MacBride were old friends, the rationale behind the choice is not difficult to discern.

"England was boasting of the devotion of her gallant Irish soldiers," and the nomination

of MacBride would "nail the boast as a lie" while showing Ireland "in her true position"

toward the war.[122] William O'Brien and the United Irish League, however, were not

about to give Griffith a free pass into the heart of the League's political territory. They

declined the offer to jointly propose MacBride, and instead they nominated John

O'Donnell, a relative unknown.

More embarrassing for Griffith was the fact that Davitt gave his endorsement to

the League's man. Although a relatively new organization, the United Irish League had a

strong grass-roots network, and an increasingly strong American support system. Its

focus was primarily agrarian, and it had been founded in response to a localized 1898

famine in Mayo. Even with the benefit of some IRB financing, Griffith faced an

impossible situation. He attempted a compromise. If the League would agree to back

MacBride, he said, the Transvaal Committee would support a candidate of O'Brien's

choosing in the follow-up election for the seat (if victorious, MacBride was certain to be

disqualified by the British, meaning another election would be required). O'Brien,

however, was confident of victory, and was not inclined to strike any such bargain.[123]

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[122] *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901.

[123] *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901. Griffith claimed that the ITC offered this compromise to William O'Brien on three occasions, only to be rebuffed every time. Patrick Maume says the "sincerity" of Griffith's offer "has been exaggerated," but it is difficult to see how this might be proven, given that

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His confidence was warranted, and John O'Donnell won the election by 2,401 to 427

votes. O'Brien's paper, the *Irish People,* subsequently led with the headline, "Faction

Smashed!" The paper was quick to deny that the League's decision to oppose

MacBride's candidacy reflected any criticism of the man himself, or indeed of the Boers.

It regretted that a band of "intriguers" had forced upon the electorate such "an unnatural

and unpatriotic contest," and it lamented that a war hero had been made the tool of

political partisans. The "people saw through" the "bogus candidature" of MacBride,

according to the *Freeman's Journal,* "without bating one jot of their sympathy with the

Boers, or their admiration for the Irish Brigade."[124]

Also defeated for the time being were any illusions Arthur Griffith may have had

about the nature of the relationship between popular anti-imperialism and popular

politics. The election "was an object lesson" that while "nationalist Ireland may have

been overwhelmingly pro-Boer," and may have relished each blow the war dealt to

imperial prestige, this did not mean that "conservative nationalism had lost control" of

the nationalist movement.[125] Griffith clearly desired a wider audience for his "new"

nationalism. The South Mayo contest, in this regard, may have underscored for him the

need for a more broadly defined political organization with which to challenge the

nationalist establishment (he would form his Sinn Féin party in 1905). In the short-term,

however, the most significant outcome of the election was that it confirmed both

Griffith's self-identification with anti-imperialism, and his hatred of the United Irish

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O'Brien did not call his bluff at the time. Maume, *Long Gestation,* 34.

[124] *The Freeman's Journal,* 26 February 1900.

[125] McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade,* 77.

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League and the Irish Parliamentary Party. Their failure to support MacBride, he insisted, was irrefutable evidence of their purely opportunistic, spineless, and shallow nationalism.[126] He would soon have another opportunity to attack the constitutionalist position on empire.

V – John Redmond and the Empire

In the Spring of 1900, with her military under heavy strain in the South African war, and nationalist Ireland boisterously pro-Boer, Queen Victoria announced that as a gesture of gratitude to her Irish regiments, they were to be permitted to wear shamrock on their uniforms for St. Patrick's Day. John Redmond, as leader of the Irish Party, was beholden to respond to the Queen's announcement. The Irish people, he said, would "welcome this graceful recognition of the valour of their race, whatever the field upon which that valour [had] been exhibited."[127] The statement, intended as a compromise, met with a torrent of criticism in Ireland. The *United Irishman* blasted Redmond and "the Irish slaves in the British House of Commons who [had] cheered [his] calumny on the Irish people." Nationalists of virtually every opinion, including Alfred Webb, John O'Leary, and John Dillon, were quick to distance themselves from what they saw as Redmond's inadequate and obsequious response.[128]

The subsequent announcement that Queen Victoria was to actually visit Ireland

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[126] *The United Irishman*, 11 May 1901.
[127] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. 80, c. 402, 8 March, 1900.
[128] *The United Irishman*, 17 March 1900; Senia Paseta, "Nationalist Responses to two royal visits to Ireland, 1900 and 1903," *Irish Historical Studies* 31 (1999), 489.

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provoked an even stronger outburst from nationalists. W.B. Yeats denounced the Queen as "the official head and symbol of an Empire that [was] robbing the South African Republics of their liberty, as it robbed Ireland of hers."[129] The *United Irishman* published an inflammatory Maud Gonne article entitled "The Famine Queen," in which she catalogued in graphic detail Ireland's suffering during Victoria's long reign.[130] The article incensed Dublin Castle, and for the first time, authorities moved to suppress the *United Irishman*. Its offices were raided and all copies of the offending edition were confiscated from newsagents. Even William O'Brien's *Irish People* declared this attempt at censorship a "gross and stupid performance" and a "grotesque blunder," for the publicity had meant that Gonne's article was reprinted in many of the English newspapers.[131] O'Brien's paper, while unenthusiastic about Victoria's visit, had in common with other moderate journals, urged nationalists to be responsible, and "to treat the Queen with silent respect." It regretted nonetheless the "orgie of flunkeyism" which subsequently greeted Victoria upon her arrival in Dublin, just as it mocked the "half-emancipated genteel Cawtholics (sic)" who had tripped over each other to be a part of the royal visit.[132] One of the most controversial incidents surrounding the visit was the decision by Dublin Corporation, a predominantly nationalist body, to present the Queen with a loyal address. Alfred Webb was among those who censured the Corporation's

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[129] *The Freeman's Journal*, 20 March 1900.
[130] *The United Irishman*, 7 April 1900.
[131] *The Irish People*, 14 April 1900.
[132] *The Irish People*, 14 April and 7 April 1900.

members for what he deemed their cautiousness and hypocrisy.[133]

Despite these controversies, Victoria's trip to Ireland in April 1900 was relatively

uneventful, and thousands of Irish people turned out, if perhaps not to wish the Queen

well, at least to be part of the public spectacle.[134] The *United Irishman* anticipated that

the "Anglo-Jew news agencies" would "deluge the Continental Press with splashing

accounts" of Irish royal enthusiasm.[135] Griffith was troubled at the poor impression

Victoria's Irish welcome created abroad, but his larger concern related to politics much

closer to home. The royal visit, he warned readers, was to be "made the occasion of an

attempt to entrap Irish Nationalists into support of the United Irish League and the new

Parliamentarianism." He predicted that moderates in both organizations would point to

their condemnation of Dublin Corporation's loyal address as evidence of their bold

nationalism (and by inference, separatism). Griffith had, it seemed, learned a bitter

lesson from his experience with the anti-war protests. The Irish people, he said, must be

"on their guard" if they were to "save themselves from being utilized to rehabilitate the

Irish Constitutional movement" by restoring its lost credibility. The *United Irishman*

reminded its readers of Redmond's "shamrock" statement and of O'Brien's failure to

back MacBride in South Mayo. Did these men, it asked, really expect the Irish people to

"forgive" them or to hail them as "stainless patriots," simply because they opposed the

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Condon, "The Patriotic Children's Treat,"167-178; Paseta, "Nationalist Responses to two royal visits to Ireland," 495-496.
[135] *The United Irishman*, 24 March 1900.

Corporation's decision to honor the Queen?[136]

John Redmond was for many years to bear the brunt of both the *Worker's Republic* and the *United Irishman*'s assault on constitutionalism. Connolly called Redmond a "verbal acrobatic patriot," and accused him of being inconsistent in his nationalism. The Irish Party leader was, Connolly mockingly charged, opposed to "all English influence – except in the *Independent* office, where [he could] make a bit out of it."[137] Arthur Griffith was particularly critical of Redmond's record on imperial questions. Less than a month after the South Mayo election, the *United Irishman* denounced him for stumping on behalf of the "Jingo policy of imperial federation," which was, the paper said, the "newest-fangled dodge" designed to rally Britain's dependencies "to the permanent aid of the Imperial pirates."[138] Redmond's 1895 Cambridge speech on separation was invoked so often and the phrase "impossible and undesirable" used so frequently by Griffith and Connolly, that readers needed no reference to know its provenance.[139] Redmond's attempt at a diplomatic response in the "shamrock affair" had backfired completely, and the incident only served to compound his reputation as a slave to British opinion and a clandestine imperialist.

Increasingly, the Irish Party leader was held up as proof that constitutionalists, although nominally pro-Boer, were in no way opposed to imperialism or to an imperial future for Ireland. Redmond, according to James Connolly, had "refused to take sides

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[136] *The United Irishman*, 17 March 1900.
[137] *The Worker's Republic*, 15 July 1899. This was a rather unsubtle reference to the fact that Redmond's *Irish Independent* received considerable financial backing from British investors.
[138] *The United Irishman*, 24 March 1900.
[139] *The Worker's Republic*, 23 September 1899.

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with the Boers until he saw plainly, that he was risking his chance with the Irish people for the still more [unlikely] chance of a second donation from Cecil Rhodes." The whole cast of the Irish Party was suspect in this regard. Citing Redmond's public boast that "Ireland [had] built up the Empire," the *Worker's Republic* noted that "Irish Home Rulers cheered [in response] instead of groaning in shame."[140] In March 1901, the *United Irishman* drew readers' attention to a recent address Redmond had given to an Irish audience in Bradford, England. The testimony of the party leader himself, it insisted, now bolstered the claim that "the Home Rule Party was neither National nor Nationalist." Redmond had told the Bradford audience that "Home Rulers [had] never had any quarrel with the democracy of England; that Home Rulers [were] disaffected, not to England, but to the system of government [in Ireland]; that the reason Home Rulers rejoiced at Boer successes [was] because England [refused] Ireland Home Rule; and that in return for Home Rule Ireland would become loyal to the Empire." The lesson to the Irish people, according to Griffith, was that "Home Rulers [were] merely Imperialists with a grievance." By the admission of their leader, they would "willingly aid England in its war upon the South African Republics or upon any other nation if that grievance were removed." Rather than the recognition of nationality or the vindication of Irish sovereignty, they worked only to achieve the shabby Liberal objectives of "the material betterment of Ireland" and the "maintenance of the English connection." The paper did "not deny their right to pursue any such objects; but [it did] deny their right to call

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[140] *The Worker's Republic*, July 1902 (now monthly).

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themselves Irish Nationalists."[141]

Just two days after Redmond had thus "urged his countrymen to impress upon the

English ... that Home Rulers desired an Imperialist Ireland," he told a London audience

that that he was "fully in sympathy with the creation of an Irish Ireland."[142] Griffith

fulminated at what he insisted was the intentional vagueness and hypocrisy at the center

of constitutionalist politics. Popular support for the Irish Party, he said, was based on a

lie, in the sense that the majority wrongly believed the party "separatist at heart."[143]

Connolly, likewise, accused Redmond of "using conveniently vague phrases, and

expressing occasionally democratic and revolutionary sentiments in order to retain the

Irish electors as ... political tools."[144] Worse than the fact that Home Rulers were

misrepresenting Irish nationalism in Britain and Ireland, was the fact that they were doing

so on fund-raising trips to the United States. Connolly marveled at how in America the

Irish Party fundraisers had made "great revolutionary speeches, [while] in Canada they

made loyal speeches."[145] Posing as separatists and staunch anti-imperialists, the Home

Rulers and their colleagues in the United Irish League got money from Americans "under

false pretenses."[146] "Our parliamentarians at home are revolutionists in America!" Maud

Gonne exclaimed in mock wonder. She pointed to Patrick Ford's *Irish World*, then

closely allied to the United Irish League, as "one of the scientifically complex

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[141] *The United Irishman*, 23 March 1901.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Maume, *Long Gestation*, 56.
[144] *The Worker's Republic*, 23 September 1899.
[145] *The Worker's Republic*, December 1901. Connolly mocked that, "the report of Mr. Redmond's first meeting in America was published in Dublin twenty minutes before the meeting began in New York."
[146] *The Worker's Republic*, 23 September 1899.

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instruments" through which the "magic metamorphosis" took place.[147]

Although no longer an MP, Michael Davitt was still aligned with the constitutionalists and he sought to reassure would-be American donors that Home Rulers were pursuing an aggressively anti-imperial line. He told William O'Brien that Irish Americans manifested "a very strong interest in the cause of the Boers," and that as such, they would "expect our friends in the talking shop [House of Commons] to make a very strong stand against the Government." It would be a good idea, he suggested, if MP J.J. O'Kelly were to "deliver one of his closely reasoned little speeches" against the South African War. In another letter to O'Brien, Davitt advised him to include in his weekly cable to Patrick Ford's *Irish World* something about "the virtues of the Boers" for, "that is what Ford likes."[148] "How Pat Ford will gush to receive Mr. Redmond," the *United Irishman* remarked sarcastically, "the man who in ... 1883 repudiated the *Irish World*" as an organ of terrorism.[149] Griffith blasted the Irish Party's attempt to "inveigle the Irish in America into supporting Parliamentary humbug." He warned Americans that their dollars were being used "to support a scheme totally inconsistent with separation."[150] The day had passed, he said, when the Irish Party "could strike Irish Nationalists in Ireland and then go to America and spout of nationality."[151]

Redmond was often unfavorably compared to Parnell. His apparent readiness to

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[147] *The United Irishman*, 22 June 1901.

[148] Michael Davitt to William O'Brien (17 January and 26 January, 1900): William O'Brien Papers, NLI, MS 913. Patrick Ford's *Irish World* was strongly supportive of the Boer cause. See Ní Bhroiméil, "The South African War, empire and the *Irish World*, 1899-1902:" 195-216.

[149] Major John MacBride, recently returned from South Africa, and Maud Gonne "the Irish Joan of Arc" had spent the spring of 1901 touring and fundraising for Griffith's paper. *United Irishman*, 8 June 1901.

[150] *The United Irishman*, 27 July 1901 and 5 October 1901.

[151] *The United Irishman*, 5 October 1901.

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mollify British imperial sentiment contributed to the perception of him as a pale imitation of his predecessor. It is possible, though unlikely, that Parnell, had he still been leader of the Irish Party in 1899, would have been more willing than Redmond to risk alienating the Liberals. He too would have been forced into a difficult position had the South African War occurred with Home Rule still not on the horizon. No amount of pro-Boer rhetoric from Irish MPs could disguise the fact that the political fortunes of Home Rule depended on the Irish Party's assurances of imperial loyalty – regardless of whether Liberals or Conservatives were in power. The Party's opponents were only too happy to point to its limited range of political options. The *United Irishman* claimed that in revealing the true nature of the Home Rule movement the paper had cleared "the ground of sham," and laid "the foundation of the Irish Nation."[152] The Irish Party's pro-Boerism was labeled empty politicking rather than genuine nationalist anti-imperialism. Home Rule's true position on the Empire, according to the *United Irishman*, could be judged from John Redmond's willingness to implicate Ireland even further in the imperial project.

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Despite the best efforts of Griffith, however, Redmond's re-united parliamentary party was still firmly in control of Irish nationalism, and it would remain so until 1914.[153] The Irish Transvaal Committee, in contrast, had lost steam by the middle of 1900. While

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[152] *The United Irishman*, 2 November 1901.
[153] Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98-103; Jackson, *Ireland*, 186.

certainly an irritant for constitutionalists, Griffith and Connolly even in tandem, were in no position to offer a serious political (as opposed to ideological) challenge to the Irish Party. In this context, Home Rule continued for most nationalists to be the only workable solution to the Irish Question. The Empire's ability to crush a threat far away in South Africa underscored to many, none more so than Arthur Griffith, the impossibility of mounting a successful armed rebellion in Ireland.[154] Nonetheless, in insisting that authentic nationalist political ideology must be explicitly anti-imperialist, the Transvaal Committee had defined a political direction that, while it appealed to popular imagination, was virtually impossible for constitutionalists to publicly endorse. The ending of the South African War bought some time for Redmond's party, but the imperial question had not gone away.

This chapter has argued that the South African War in 1899 had a profound effect on the both Irish nationalist political ideology and on the nationalist movement itself. The anti-imperialism that had been a part of nationalist political ideology for sixty years was thrust into the center of nationalist politics. On the surface, advanced nationalists might appear to have lost ground during these years: the Irish Transvaal Committee survived only a few months and the South Mayo by-election ended in a rout. On a deeper level, however, the radicals had succeeded in identifying their politics as the politics of anti-imperialism and in identifying Home Rule as the politics of empire. While such ideological gains may not have seemed of great consequence in 1902, they would certainly be important in the altered political landscape created by the 1916 Rising.

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[154] McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, 145.

Conclusion

Anti-imperialism was a persistent theme within Irish nationalist political ideology from the mid-nineteenth century up to and including the South African War in 1899-1902. Irish nationalist anti-imperialism was not reflexive Anglophobia, but rather was the product of a considered and sophisticated ideological critique of empire that had developed over the course of several decades. In the 1840s, Thomas Davis and John Mitchel definitively established anti-imperialism as an explicit theme in nationalist discourse. John Mitchel's economic and cultural critique of imperialism provided inspiration to many subsequent Irish nationalists, both radical and conservative. In the immediate aftermath of Mitchel's death in 1875, the most radical Irish anti-imperialism was found among Irish nationalists in the United States. In the 1870s Irish American anti-imperial discourse centered on a radical economic critique of international capitalism, while in the 1890s it was driven by a resurgent republicanism. Irish-American anti-imperialism contributed to the coherency of the broader nationalist critique of empire and it gave it an explicitly republican slant. Although its political program was not separatist, the Irish Parliamentary Party's focus on imperial questions

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also represented an important contribution to Irish anti-imperial discourse. The Party's policy of explicitly identifying with the colonized rather than with the colonizers imbued its political stance with an inherent radicalism. Michael Davitt and the Parnellites re-oriented nationalist discourse away from identification with the metropolitan imperial perspective. The South African War nonetheless marked the beginning of a period in which advanced nationalists cast the Home Rule project as out of step with broader Irish opinion on imperialism. Although this more extreme group remained on the margins of Irish politics after the war, it had successfully taken control of Irish anti-imperial discourse, and had re-cast it as a fundamentally separatist political ideology. Irish nationalists continued their anti-imperial discourse after the South African War had ended. This ongoing debate provided much of the ideological backdrop to the 1916 Easter Rising and later, to the dramatic power shift within Irish nationalism itself. Sinn Féin's victory in the 1918 general election represents the political expression of an anti-imperial current that had long been a part of Irish nationalist political ideology.

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Epilogue - An Irish Empire?

Ireland's response to the South African War suggests that many Irish people, despite their continued electoral support for Home Rule, felt a deep ambivalence toward the Empire. Most advanced nationalists, however, were far from ambivalent, and the war reinforced for them the need for Irish nationalism to address the question of imperialism. Anti-imperialism in Ireland did not, as is sometimes implied, disappear after the South African War ended.[1] On the contrary, there was a vibrant and intense nationalist discourse on empire in the first decade of the twentieth century. Naturally, the war's end brought a dramatic decline in the amount of newspaper space devoted to South Africa, and popular anti-imperial enthusiasm lessened considerably when news of the Boer defeat sank in.[2] Moderate nationalist leaders, moreover, and some elite nationalists, continued to believe that accommodation within the British Empire was a politically achievable and even a desirable goal.[3] Among a group of advanced nationalists, however, the removal of the immediate issue – the war – actually stimulated a more

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[1] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 458; Carla King, "Michael Davitt, Irish nationalism and the British empire," 130.
[2] McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, 144.
[3] Paseta, *Before the Revolution*, 129.

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nuanced and more sophisticated analysis of the broader question of imperialism.

For those who had been galvanized by the South African War, then, the question of imperialism continued to be a critical one in the years before the 1916 Rising. There was considerable debate within advanced nationalist circles, not so much concerning the definition of imperialism, as concerning the definition of anti-imperialism. Two distinct (though not always antagonistic) advanced nationalist camps participated in the debate. Both groups accepted implicitly that imperialism was detrimental to the nation. They disagreed, however, on the relationship between nationalism and anti-imperialism. The question came down to this: was Irish nationalism a form of anti-imperialism, or was anti-imperialism a form of Irish nationalism? For Socialists like James Connolly and his colleague Frederick Ryan, the first instance was the case: the Irish nationalist struggle was merely one front in a wider war against numerous interwoven tyrannies.[4] Imperialism represented the collective embodiment of all the political, social, and economic forces that oppressed the individual. Irish nationalist leaders were thus called upon to identify their struggle with that of the working class, with Jews, with the struggle of Indians and Africans, indeed, with all "progressive" movements confronting established tyranny.[5]

For the second group of nationalists, associated with Arthur Griffith and Sinn

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[4] A cultural nationalist and a Socialist, Ryan (1876-1913) was a member of the Celtic Literary Society, secretary to both the Irish National Theatre Society and the Irish Socialist Republican Party, and later, national secretary of the Socialist Party of Ireland. Ryan's interests thus spanned several different intellectual milieus, and he counted as friends Arthur Griffith, James Connolly, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and Tom Kettle MP. Forced by financial necessity to work as an accountant, Ryan moonlighted over the years as editor to several progressive journals, including *Dana* (1905-1905), the *National Democrat* (1907), the *Egyptian Standard* (1908-1909), and *Egypt* (1911-1913).
[5] *The United Irishman*, 23 January, 23 April, 28 May, and 11 June 1904; *Dana*, May 1904 and June 1904.

Féin, this notion epitomized what John Mitchel had so often dismissed as cosmopolitan cant. Griffith founded his influential Sinn Féin movement in 1905 as an amalgam of several different nationalist organizations.[6] The basis of Sinn Féin nationalism was economic, political, and cultural self-sufficiency. Griffith explicitly denied Frederick Ryan the title of nationalist on the grounds that he had implied "that a nation was nothing more than a collection of human beings, and that the interests of the nation were nothing more than the interests of the said human beings." Griffith did "not mean by Ireland the peasants in the fields," but rather "the soul into which we were born and which was born into us." His nation, Griffith argued, was "a man's ancestral title on the earth," and, it was his "first duty and point of honour to maintain" it before anything else.[7] The nation – as an abstract collective - was the basic unit of civilization, and the struggle for national sovereignty was not to be put on an equal footing with other lesser struggles, regardless of their individual merit.

To a great extent, these two intellectual camps formulated their respective definitions of anti-imperialism in an ongoing debate with each other. Ryan and Connolly were often at odds with Griffith, but the two sides nonetheless agreed that Ireland wanted no part of any imperial project, whether British or her own. Evidence of this can be found in a spirited eight-week exchange in the pages of the *United Irishman* in the spring of 1902. The debate was sparked by an editorial entitled "A Plea for Irish Imperialism,"

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[6] The group's newspaper was also entitled *Sinn Féin*. Its name translates as "Ourselves on Our Own." Although there was a good deal of overlap between Sinn Féin and the IRB, many Fenians had little time for Griffith's model of passive resistance and his advocacy of dual monarchy (as in Austria-Hungary) as an alternative to republicanism.
[7] *Sinn Féin*, 26 April 1913.

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which appeared on 18 January. In it and two subsequent articles, the author, "Ier Ier,"

used a Darwinian model of international relations to put the case that the Irish were

"naturally imperialists," and that Ireland's only chance at survival was to either stay

annexed to the British Empire or start an empire of her own. He argued that, "however

interesting or picturesque ... the little nation ... with its little flag ... must go the way that

the knights-errant, the Crusaders, the professional pirate, and the highwayman have gone

– to the museum." The "future of Ireland," was, he said, "linked with empire," one way

or the other. Imperialism, "like machinery, [had] come to stay," and the author had "seen

no practicable program by which Ireland [could] oppose it, even if the people wished to

oppose it."[8]

The suggestion that imperialism was a progressive and even inevitable

development, and one that made the nation obsolete, clearly touched a nerve with

Griffith, Connolly, and Ryan, each of whom responded indignantly to "Ier Ier's" claims.

Griffith entitled his response "Little Ireland," and he opened by declaring, "I am not an

imperialist." Nobody, he said, could "dazzle" him with "visions of [himself] singing

'Hibernia Rules the Waves.'" Hibernia, he said, "did not want to rule the waves," and, in

any case, he added, "it would be bad for Hibernia and the waves if she did rule them."

The concept of imperialism, he argued, would fall "of its own viciousness," crushing "its

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[8] *United Irishman*, 18 January, 22 February and 8 March 1902. "Ier Ier" is a pseudonym. It has not been possible to establish the author's true identity. One potential candidate is Oliver St. John Gogarty, a contemporary poet, wit, and sometime contributor to the *United Irishman*. One of Griffith's many pseudonyms was "Ier" which is Afrikaans for Irishman. The author may have chosen the name as a dig at both Griffith and the "Irish Ireland" movement. His initial article was clearly a light-hearted piece of provocation, although the tone of his subsequent letters was quite serious. He mocked contemporaries (like Griffith) who constantly alluded to an Irish Golden Age before the arrival of the nefarious Saxon. In those "days of 'virtue and honour,'" he said, "a few boat-loads of Danes were able to kick and cuff the natives from one end of Ireland to the other."

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votaries in the fall." Griffith dismissed the idea that Ireland received any economic benefit from its association with the British Empire, and he predicted that a completely self-contained "Irish Republic would be quite able to guard the interests and promote the prosperity of 30,000,000 Irish men and women."[9]

Blasting what he said was the "political fatuity" and the "essential immorality" of imperialism, Frederick Ryan also denied that Ireland had any imperial destiny. "Tyranny is tyranny," he said, "under whatever auspices" it appears. Thus, "the Boer's right to liberty would not be a whit the less if Irishmen were sitting in Downing street, or for that matter ... in College-green, and were butchering them in the name of Irish Imperialism as they are being butchered today in the name of that of England." Ryan called for a much broader assault on imperialism, one in which the very concept of empire was exposed as unjust. In this light, he castigated those who only found fault with British imperialism, the "tyranny which happens to affect this country," while having "no condemnation for the American aggression in the Philippines or the European aggression in China." The assumption that Asian cultures were "barbarous or uncivilized," was, he said, due to the "ignorance of the Western mind which [regarded] all peoples whose life [was] not an exact duplicate of its own, as inferior or degraded."[10]

James Connolly took "Ier Ier" to task for his assumption "that Imperialism [was] something which [was] necessarily involved in the existence of large industrial and commercial developments," and that, as a consequence, "an Anti-Imperialist must be one who believes in crude and primitive methods of industry, adapted only to the wants and

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[9] *The United Irishman*, 15 March 1902. Griffith wrote under the pseudonym "Ier."
[10] *The United Irishman*, 8 February and 22 March 1902. Ryan wrote under the pseudonym "Irial."

capacities of a small community having no relations with foreign countries." Connolly

defined imperialism as "the government of one people by force according to the ideas of

another people." As an anti-imperialist, he said, he believed a relationship on these terms

"to be evil." He was not against the idea of internationalism or cosmopolitan

cooperation, however, and had "no objection to even the most complicated and intimate

relationships between different countries when these relations [were] entered into by

common consent and for common benefit." "Ier Ier's" mistake, in Connolly's judgment,

was to conflate anti-imperialism with isolationism. The argument that Ireland "could not

have foreign trade without having foreign possessions and, indeed, becoming herself the

centre of an empire," he found completely absurd. Responding to "Ier Ier's" question as

to what the anti-imperialists proposed to do about empire, Connolly said his own plan

was "to convince the people who live under Imperialistic governments," that it was their

"own direct material interests which [were] most compromised by the Imperial policy."

In any regard, he said, empire was "essentially transitory, because its tendencies [were]

self-destructive," insomuch as "the social organization fostered by empire" was bound to

lead to revolt among those at the bottom of the imperial and capitalist order.[11]

Although profoundly different in many respects, the two models of Irish anti-

imperialism in the early twentieth century – as articulated by Griffith and Connolly – may

also be seen as informed by a common source; John Mitchel. Mitchel's anti-imperialism

had both radical and reactionary undercurrents. His critique of international capitalism

clearly resonated with James Connolly who lived and worked in the United States from

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[11] *The United Irishman*, 1 March and 15 March 1902. Connolly wrote under the pseudonym "Scotus."

1903 until 1910.[12] His experience there underscored for Connolly the role of international

capitalism in geopolitics, and one contemporary observer commented of him that he

"certainly came home from America saturated with the writings of Mitchel."[13] As

Mitchel had, Connolly observed that the Irish peasant who fled to America only to

become a wage slave, was in essence no freer than he had been in Ireland. Emigration,

Connolly said, "does not bring the Irish worker from slave to freedom. It only lands him

into a slavery swifter and more deadly in its effects." The final cruel irony was that the

immigrant who had sought to "escape British tyranny" often found himself toiling in

America for the very same master.[14] The "Englishman," Connolly said, was "world-wide

in his financial activities, and the sun never [set] on his investments." That the police in

the United States were being deployed against American workers on behalf of British

owned industry, Connolly declared "a greater plunder of Americans than King George

ever dreamt of."[15] As Mitchel had, he viewed imperialism as inextricably bound to

exploitative capitalism and to the ideology of political economy.

Arthur Griffith's thinking also strongly reflected that of Mitchel in that his

definition of nationalism was explicitly and uncompromisingly anti-cosmopolitan.

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[12] Connolly's departure from Ireland was due in some measure to internal squabbling in the ISRP. He held various jobs while in America, from insurance salesman to organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Labor Party. He also edited *The Harp* newspaper. Connolly returned to Ireland in 1910 and worked on behalf of the Socialist Party of Ireland, of which Ryan had been a founding member. J.L Hyland, *James Connolly* (Dublin: Historical Association of Ireland, 1997), 1-3; See also, Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978).
[13] Lyons, *Some Recollections of Griffith*, 14. Lyons's chronology seems to somewhat off, however, as he makes this comment in the context of Connolly's activity with the Irish Transvaal Committee. Connolly first went to America in August 1902 on a fund-raising trip. He came home briefly before returning to the US in 1903, this time for seven years.
[14] *The Harp*, February 1908. Connolly's *Harp* listed off the numbers of big British landowners who were investors in American industries.
[15] *The Harp*, January 1910.

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Griffith's dismissal of the "Brotherhood of Man" as "cant" and as a string "with which to pull the stupid population," reflected Mitchel's hostility to cosmopolitan ideologies in general.[16] Cosmopolitanism, whether it masqueraded as international Socialism or British "philanthropic" imperialism, asked Irishmen to pretend that they had already won their freedom and were no longer "helots in [their] own land."[17] Like Mitchel (and Davis), Griffith saw empire as the denial of Irish nationality. The British Empire had robbed the Irish people's birth-right and future (the nation being the source of a people's "genius"). The nation, for Griffith, was a distinct and transcendent entity as opposed to a mere collective of inhabitants. If empire was a denial of the nation, anti-imperialism as a consequence was first and foremost a fight for national recognition and national sovereignty. Whereas Griffith's economic critique of imperialism would be at the level of the nation (in terms of the drain of national resources), Connolly's anti-imperialism placed greater emphasis on the individual and class repercussions of empire.

II

Despite their differences, Griffith, Connolly, and Ryan challenged those in Ireland who appeared, in the years after the South African War, to be conditioning the Irish people toward seeing the Empire as a benign association of equals. John Redmond had continued to insist that Home Rulers wanted to share, not to destroy, the British Empire. He asked a 1911 British audience "whose Empire is this? Yours? No, it is ours as well as

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[16] *Sinn Féin*, 12 April 1913.

[17] Arthur Griffith, *How Ireland Has 'prospered' Under English Rule and The Slave Mind* (New York: Irish Progressive League, 1911), 14.

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yours. I say that Home Rule is not separation, it is closer union; it is not a weakening of

the Empire it is a strengthening of the Empire."[18] John Dillon, however, continued the

Irish Party's tradition of criticizing the more egregious examples of imperial excess. His

parliamentary interventions on behalf of Egypt won the respect and friendship of one of

Britain's most noted anti-imperialists, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.

In his diary, however, Blunt charted what he believed was the gradual slide of the

Irish Party (including Dillon) into the imperialist camp. As early as 1908, he wondered if

Dillon's enthusiasm for colonial federation was not excessive and colored by "a tinge of

Imperialism."[19] By 1912, he accused Redmond's party of consistently abetting British

"imperial misdeeds" in what he termed "a disgraceful betrayal of the cause of liberty."

Although Dillon had "preserved his integrity ... even he had come to regard the retention

of Egypt as a necessary part of British interests." The Irish nationalism which Blunt had

known since the 1880s (during the Land War) had, he said, "been converted to English

Liberalism," and "Irish parliamentarians [had] become more Imperialistic" than their

British counterparts.[20]

The early twentieth century saw an attempt to rehabilitate the Empire's reputation

among Irish nationalists. The Empire was described as a commonwealth in all but name.

A two-part 1904 defense of empire in *Dana* provoked a strong response from Frederick

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[18] *The Freeman's Journal*, 29 May 1911. Reprinted in Ian Malcom, *Convicted: The Goal of Nationalism Disclosed by Irish Home rulers – A Record of Disloyal Speeches, Resolutions Etc., in Ireland and America Between 1880 and 1911* (London: Union Defence League, 1913), 30-31.

[19] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries; Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1921), 194, 199. Blunt himself was critical of imperial federation on the grounds that, among other things, it would leave the blacks of South Africa at the mercy of the country's white population.

[20] Blunt, *My Diaries*, 384, 404.

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Ryan. The Irish author of the essay argued that, "imperialism, justly understood, [was Ireland's] friend and not her foe." Ireland was described as a true "partner in a great imperial dominion." The author argued that the "the power of the central [imperial] authority, instead of being a menace, is, on the contrary, the surest warrant and protection of ... local liberties and of the individuality" of each state.[21]

In response to the essay, Frederick Ryan pointed to what he said was the old trick whereby imperial apologists described the British Empire as though it were an enlightened gentleman's club made up of none but the self-governing Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. They "colloquially speak of New Zealand or Australia as portions of the British Empire," he said, even though "their self-government [was] not due to any idea of Empire." Topics such as the "massacre of the Matabele or the Tibetans, the robbery of the Boer States, the ignoble and costly farce in Somaliland, and the never ending 'frontier expeditions' in India" were tacitly avoided by such imperial apologists. In a message clearly directed at Redmond's Irish Party, Ryan warned that it was completely unacceptable "to ask us to approve these wars as a matter of political tactic – so that by applauding the crime we ingratiate ourselves with the criminal." As had Davitt, Ryan declared that "if the only way for Ireland to gain her liberty ... were for her to join England in trampling on the liberty of some other people," he trusted that the "mass of Irishmen [would] never hesitate about their course."[22]

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[21] "Imperialism" in *Dana*, May 1904 and June 1904. The essays were written under the pseudonym "Ossorian." Author is possibly Standish O'Grady. Griffith dismissed the essays as "replete with ignorance of that kind which has made Mr. Standish O'Grady's historical works so amusing and so delightful." *United Irishman*, 11 June 1904.
[22] "Empire and Liberty," *Dana*, August 1904.

Griffith echoed this sentiment. While the British Empire existed, he said, "the majority of Irishmen [would] not boast" that they were its citizens. The Irish were not fooled by promises of imperial "partnership," because they knew "that the acceptance of the British Empire [was] the acceptance of English ascendancy." Griffith warned Unionists that "if they see Ireland an equal partner in the Empire with England, they will find their bitterest opponents not in Irishmen, but in Englishmen," for "to the Englishman ... the Empire means England Over All, and has never meant anything else."[23] Griffith mocked those deluded enough to imagine that one could be both a nationalist and an imperialist. Such people talked "about the Empire and the fine free institutions of that Empire which has made Ireland what it is today – half poorhouse and half cattle ranch." It was Grattan, Griffith said, "who declared that if the interests of the Empire clashed with the liberties of Ireland, then he, and every Irishman, would cry: 'Live Ireland, perish the Empire.'"[24]

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Many of those who participated in the 1916 Rising saw themselves as finishing work that the Boers had begun in 1899. James Connolly, in 1902, predicted that imperialism would push Ireland toward revolution because it spread exploitation and corruption through every level of society. "When this point is reached in the development of an Empire," he said, "it has not much chance against a few determined

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[23] Arthur Griffith, "True and False Imperialism," *The Irish Review* Vol. 1 (1911), 270, 272.
[24] Griffith, *How Ireland has Prospered*, 16.

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men ... with arms in their hands and contempt of death in their hearts."[25] Roger

Casement believed that Irish nationalism stood "at the forefront of human freedom –

fighting a battle that [was] worldwide," for, "a free Ireland will mean a free India – and a

free Egypt in the end."[26] Two years before the Rising, Patrick Pearse warned that

"whenever England goes on her mission of Empire we meet and we strike her ...

yesterday it was on the South African veldt, tomorrow it may be on the streets of

Dublin."[27]

Historians agree that, like Pearse, the majority of Irish people were sympathetic to

the Boers during the South African War, but there is less agreement as to what this says,

if anything, about nationalist attitudes to the Empire. Senia Paseta has argued that in the

years prior to the 1916 Rising, mainstream Irish nationalism, which continued to receive

popular backing, was moving decisively toward an imperial future for Ireland.[28] In fact,

she implies, Home Rule MPs like Tom Kettle represented the future leaders of that

Empire as it transitioned (apparently inevitably peacefully) into a Commonwealth.[29] The

implication of this argument is that the 1916 Rising was an unnecessary interruption of

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[25] *The United Irishman*, 15 March 1902.

[26] Roger Casement to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 14 May 1914 and 16 May 1914. Included in appendix to Blunt, *My Diaries*, 455-457. Irish by birth, Casement had joined the British Consular service in 1892 and had achieved some fame as the British consul to the Congo, from where he wrote a scathing official report detailing Belgian atrocities against the native Congolese (1903). The report and the subsequent revelations by the Congo Reform Association (formed by E.D. Morel after consultation with Casement) caused a huge public and political outcry. Casement was an early Gaelic League member and Irish-Ireland enthusiast. He had tried to induce Redmond's Irish Party to pursue the Congo question in parliament, but he found them unhelpful. Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 127. Casement's enthusiasm for the Irish language and his growing nationalism soon led him to Arthur Griffith. From 1905 he became a sometime contributor to *Sinn Féin*, and his articles demonstrate that he shared Griffith's conception of empire as inimical to national life.

[27] Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, *Quotations from P.H. Pearse* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1979), 10; also cited in McCracken, *Irish Pro-Boers*, 145.

[28] Paseta, *Before the Revolution*, 153.

[29] Ibid., 127.

this process of gradual imperial evolution. There is no question that Kettle was a

visionary; he had written in 1910 that his "only counsel to Ireland" was "that in order to

become deeply Irish, she must become European."[30] As a visionary, however, Kettle

based his arguments for embracing the Empire on what might have been, rather than what

actually was. He fell into the trap, identified by Frederick Ryan, of conflating the British

Empire with the relationship which existed between Britain and the self-governing

nations of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The British Commonwealth did not

exist in 1916. The Rising of that year was against the British Empire.

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[30] T.M Kettle, *The Day's Burden* (Dublin: Maunsel and Co., 1918), xii.