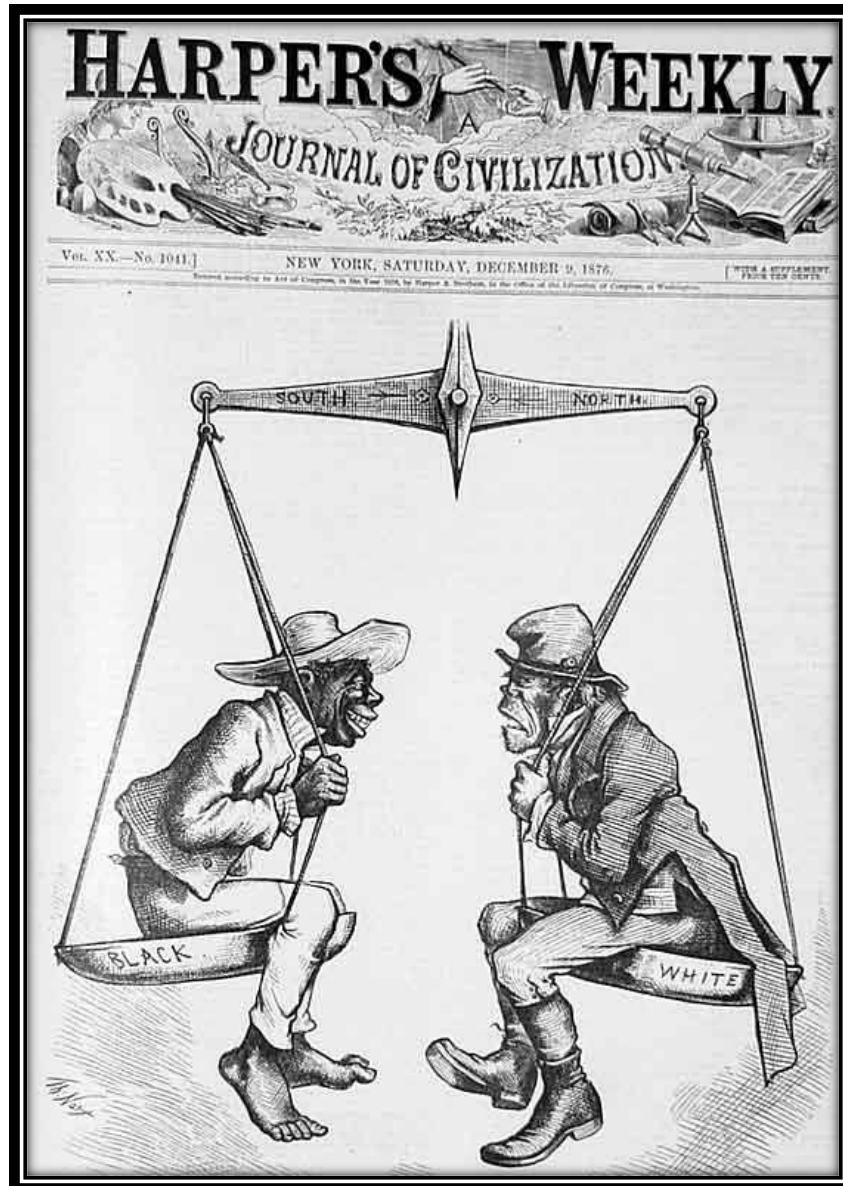


# Getting 'Nasty'

Thomas Nast and the simianization of the Irish in late nineteenth-century America



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## Introduction

“I don’t care so much what the papers write about me - my constituents can’t read. But, damn it, they can see pictures!”<sup>1</sup> In 1871, prominent New York politician William M. Tweed fervently protested the negative portrayals of him in several *Harper’s Weekly* illustrations. The cartoons, drawn by the American cartoonist Thomas Nast, were part of a critical attack on the government of New York City for corruption, targeting Tammany Hall, the headquarters of the Democratic Party, from where Tweed lead the organization. Under the guise of “Well what are you going to do about it?” Nast’s anti-Tammany drawings encouraged readers into action.<sup>2</sup>

Tweed’s complaints made sense; illiterate people can read pictures. In the nineteenth century, cartoons were often considered powerful tools for informing the unlettered masses, which for Tweed eventually turned out to be a problem. After the Civil War, New York City expanded enormously and so did the political influence of the Democratic Party, mainly through major corruption on behalf of the Democratic State Senator and his patriotic ‘ring’ from the Tammany Society, which robbed New York citizens of millions of dollars. Their influence was so great, that it was nearly impossible to take them down. It was the *New York Times* that uncovered the corruption story, but the downfall of the Tammany Ring was due largely to Thomas Nast’s relentless caricatures of Tweed and his associates in *Harper’s Weekly* magazine. It is even argued that the power of his cartoons was so widely recognized that when the Presidential campaign of 1872 ended with the defeat of the Democratic candidate Horace Greeley, it seemed probable to credit Nast’s cartoons for both events.<sup>3</sup>

Corruption was not the only motive for Nast to attack Tammany Hall and its associates. As an ardent Republican, Nast quickly established a consistent theme in his cartoons: the Republican Party under attack. This subject grew out of his personal Civil War experiences and he continued to use it throughout his career. At first, Nast’s topics ranged mostly over political and domestic issues of the Reconstruction Era. He, and *Harper’s Weekly*, often warned for Southern Confederates and Northern anti-Civil War ‘Copperheads’ who, in Nast’s eyes, formed a threat to his beloved Republicanism. However, over time Nast’s interests slowly started to change towards threats from the pope and violent Irish-Catholic mobs. The combination of the pope’s declaration of infallibility and the unjustifiable brutality by Irish Catholics convinced Nast of conspiracy and treachery by the Democratic Party. The negative views of the Catholic Church and the Irish in Nast’s cartoons reflected nativist notions from the Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s, but they also emphasized the general fear for the increasing

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<sup>1</sup> S. Pearl, ‘White, with a Class-Based Blight: Drawing Irish Americans’, *Éire-Ireland*, 44:3&4 (Fall/Winter 2009), 180.

<sup>2</sup> B. Justice, ‘Thomas Nast and the Public School of the 1870s’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 45:2 (Summer 2005), 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> W. Wick Reaves, ‘Thomas Nast and the President’, *American Art Journal*, 19:1 (Winter 1987), 62; J. Chal Vinson, ‘Thomas Nast and the American Political Scene’, *American Quarterly*, 9:3 (Autumn 1957), 339; Pearl, ‘White, with a Class-Based Blight’, 180.

immigration streams that seemed to threaten the American way of life.<sup>4</sup> The attack on Tammany Hall and Tweed was thus not only based on political criticism, but as well on popular public opinion with regard to the increasing number of Irish immigrants and the possible problems they might cause to society.

As mentioned before, cartoons indeed were useful as political tools to inform the illiterate. However, to understand a caricature's message one needs some education to grasp the iconography. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the British and Europeans had quickly become acquainted with a wide range of political advertisements and illustrations. This in contrast to Americans, who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, did not have easy access to images, and thus were visually uneducated. American illustrated magazines like *Harper's Weekly* did not yet exist, and illustrations were often expensive and only distributed amongst a small group of educated individuals. During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the number of illiterate immigrants arriving in the United States increased enormously, and more Americans started to depend on a visual language. Consequently, recognizable racial and ethnic stereotypes were developed that everyone (even the illiterate) could understand. Therefore, Tweed's protests were very much justified in the 1870s, because a few decades earlier, most observers of images would have been educated and were able to read, but did not have the skills to read imagery. It was only around the 1860s that American caricaturists were able to create recognizable visual cues to frame different groups for the American public, especially cues to portray the Irish.<sup>5</sup>

Also unlike Europeans, Americans seemed to be more interested in depicting aspects of social hierarchy, and less in the physiognomic aspects of identification. Rather than distinguishing racial and ethnic groups through facial characteristics, groups were frequently differentiated by class. However, during the 1850s, interest in the use of physiognomy in caricature started to increase. And as in the nineteenth century the word 'Irish' was seldom connected to the word 'civilized', the Irish immigrants were consistently depicted as alcoholics, brutish, and corrupt, but never particularly 'civilized.'<sup>6</sup>

Nast's sordid caricatures of Irish Americans grew from personal disgust after several riots involving violent behavior from predominantly Irish mobs. For example, the draft riot of 1863, when Irish-Catholic gangs terrorized the streets of New York City, attacking several targets, including African Americans. Nast was appalled by these events and molded the threat of Irish violence in the shape of simianized caricatures. Equating the Irish to apes was nothing new. The concept of this belief had been developed in England, and was put into caricatures with the ever-returning characteristics of a flat "ape-like nose, long upper lip, huge, projecting mouth, square lower jaw, and a sloping

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<sup>4</sup> Justice, 'Thomas Nast and the Public School of the 1870s', 174-175; M. Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast* (New York, 1986), 160; D. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (New Jersey 2012), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Pearl, 180-181.

<sup>6</sup> M. Forker, 'The Use of the "Cartoonist's Armoury" in Manipulating Public Opinion: Anti-Irish Imagery in 19<sup>th</sup> Century British and American Periodicals', *Journal of Irish Studies*, 27 (2012), 58; Pearl, 182-184.

forehead.”<sup>7</sup> The goal of these unflattering images of the Irish was not only to suggest an inherent violent character, but also to emphasize their inability for self-government. In the context of the rising concern of immigrants threatening American society, Nast’s vivid use of the Irish stereotype seemed to serve his political agenda well: the barbaric, radical, ungovernable, and (most importantly) Democratic Irish-Catholic formed a threat to Nast’s beloved Republican Party and needed to be put back in his rightful place: between the apes on the lowest branch of the evolutionary tree.<sup>8</sup>

Nast’s extreme distaste for Irish immigrants is interesting given the fact that he was born in a Catholic family in Germany, and emigrated at the age of six to the United States. This may tell us something about the change in the American attitude towards immigrants, and especially Catholics. Therefore, in this thesis I will to examine some of Nast’s cartoons on Irish immigration to establish in what ways these stereotypes might reflect American attitudes towards Irish Americans. In doing so, I will answer the question in what way do Thomas Nast’s cartoons in *Harper’s Weekly* represent late-nineteenth-century views of Irish Americans, in terms of race and social status?

To answer this it is important to analyze the various aspects of the subject. In what way differed the two groups of Irish immigrants arriving in nineteenth-century America? Why did so many Americans consider the second group as a challenge to their society? What caused American nativism and xenophobia to rise, how were these sentiments expressed and how did they affect Irish immigrants? What scientific processes influenced the creation of the Irish stereotype? What was the importance of a visual language for American caricatures? Where did Nast’s extreme distaste from the Irish come from and why can this be considered paradoxical? In what way did Nast apply the science of physiognomy in his cartoons of the Irish? What does that say about the status of a visual language in the United States? And what does Nast’s portrayal of African Americans say about his view of the Irish?

This study focuses on American attitudes towards Catholic Irish-Americans only. The distinction between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants is important, for the first significant wave of Irish immigrants in the early eighteenth century mostly consisted out of Scotch-Irish Protestants and were very different from the group Catholic immigrants arriving during the nineteenth century and after. It is frequently underscored that the Protestant immigrants were often “in a position to pursue wealth and opportunity and sought fortune rather than salvation.”<sup>9</sup> The group also consisted largely out of men, who had enjoyed some education, were highly skilled, and had voluntarily chosen to immigrate to America. This in sharp contrast to the group Irish Catholics. In their case immigration was not voluntary, but as a result of starvation and eviction. Moreover, for them, the voyage to the United States meant a rise in social status, as in America they could attend universities, vote, and enter politics. Naturally, not all Irish immigrants were Catholic, but many Britons and Americans quickly

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<sup>7</sup> Justice, 177.

<sup>8</sup> L.P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington 1997), 1-22, 29; Justice, 176-177.

<sup>9</sup> Pearl, 174.

regarded the two elements as inseparable during the early nineteenth century. The fact that the Irish Catholics refused to adapt once arrived in the New World, something that Protestant Irish had no problems with, did also not contribute to the formation of a positive image by their fellow Americans.<sup>10</sup> The explanation of the two terms serves as clarification, as in this thesis, the use of the term ‘Irish’ refers to ‘Irish Catholics,’ and applies to both the United States and to Britain.

The academic discussion about this topic is quite advanced. There exists a lively debate on to which degree the Irish immigrants in the United States were seen as white. For example, scholars as Noel Ignatiev, Catherine Eagan, Kevin Kenny, Matthew Frye Jacobson and Diane Negra have explored the relationship between Irish and African Americans in the United States and Great Britain. One of the earliest of the historical works about the concept of whiteness, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) by David Roediger, focuses on how white workers in the antebellum United States came to be identified as white. Roediger’s main point is that because white laborers in the United States emerged in a nation that actively participated in the slave trade, they came to define themselves by what they were not: black. With this argument, Roediger builds forth on Alexander Saxton’s analysis of the “ambivalent attitude” of white laborers in a racist society, and in doing so, particularly addresses the attempts of Irish immigrants, who were confronted by such extreme prejudice, to contradict the notion held by others that “it was by no means clear that they were white”. To cope with these experiences, they tried to differentiate themselves from black slaves by establishing their own whiteness, and thereby proving their Americanness.<sup>11</sup>

This argument is further elaborated by Noel Ignatiev in his book *How the Irish Became White* (1992). Ignatiev regarded whiteness as a “conscious and deliberate Irish strategy to counter American nativism.” He believed that “the Irish became white through an act of will” by not equating themselves to African Americans, and thus to place themselves in a higher position within society. Ignatiev assumed that “the Irish ought to have allied with Afro-Americans, but opted instead for the privileges and burdens of whiteness.”<sup>12</sup>

Matthew Frye Jacobson’s book *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998) overall addresses the same topic as Roediger, but his subjects are European immigrants moving to the United States from 1790 to 1965. Moreover, his focus lays rather on how other Americans regarded those immigrants, not on how they regarded themselves. The broadness of Jacobson’s scope “enables him to depart from a binary view of race” and “to explore the relationship between race, ethnicity, and nationality.” These books all have sparked debates about the status and collective identity of the Irish, and have “contributed to the growing and often controversial field of whiteness studies.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Pearl, 174-175.

<sup>11</sup> P. Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America’, *The Journal of American History*, 89:1 (June 2002), 155-156.

<sup>12</sup> D.A. Wilson, ‘Comment: Whiteness and Irish Experience in North America’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44:1 (January 2005), 157.

<sup>13</sup> Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 156; Pearl, 171-172.

However, over the past decade new views on the whiteness of Irish Americans have been developed. Several scholars have noted that the Irish were not seen as black at all, though suffered from severe discrimination on the basis of their position in society. For example, Sharrona Pearl specifically points out that Irish Americans were not considered black. Despite similar economic conditions, “they were not treated as blacks legally, politically, or culturally.” That is not to say that they escaped discrimination, nor does it minimize their suffering in the Great Famine of the 1840s, but “the relative sufferings of nineteenth century Irish Americans and African Americans were different,” Pearl states. “Irish Americans suffered various forms of cultural prejudices that were expressed in caricature representations, but they were protected from the legal discrimination facing African Americans.” Moreover, “whiteness did not automatically confer freedom from repression and discrimination, nor did repression and discrimination automatically confer a designation of nonwhiteness or blackness.”<sup>14</sup>

This view is shared by David Wilson, who comments on the arguments of Roediger and Ignatiev: “This model exaggerates the extent of anti-Irish prejudice in the United States, even at its height in the mid-nineteenth century.” According to Wilson, this is “partly because the argument focuses on the Irish Catholics in cities at a time when most of them did not actually live in cities, and partly because it ignores the evidence on the contrary.” Different than Ignatiev, Wilson believes “the Irish in America were not generally viewed as black, and there is no evidence that they ever saw themselves as being anything other than white.”<sup>15</sup>

In his article, Wilson refers to Richard Jensen, who, in a content analysis of 14,000 books and magazine articles, in which there were 48,000 references to the Irish, found that “Americans rarely or never referred to Blacks as ‘smoked Irish’ or to Irish as ‘white Negroes.’” Jensen also verified what a number of Canadian historians of the Irish in America had come to suspect – that there hardly had been any specific sightings of the infamous ‘No Irish Need Apply’-signs in North American newspapers.<sup>16</sup> This last notion, however, is part of a still continuing debate.

As is shown from the examples and arguments, the debate on the whiteness of the Irish in America is still standing strong. Because of the complexity of this debate, I have chosen to approach the question in a more indirect way, by studying the visual representation of the Irish Americans intensively. The visual resources of *Harper’s Weekly* and the wide array of critical scholarly studies offer an excellent opportunity to assess the status of Irish Americans through their representation in caricatures. This study will mainly focus on an analysis of several pre-selected cartoons drawn by Thomas Nast. The choice of the cartoon as a historical source is quite promising as it offers the historian concerned with public opinion and popular convictions insight in underlying attitudes among

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<sup>14</sup> Pearl, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, ‘Comment’, 157-158.

<sup>16</sup> R. Jensen, “No Irish Need Apply”: A Myth of Victimization’, *Journal of Social History*, 36:2 (Winter 2002), 405 and 426; Wilson, ‘Comment’, 156.

specific groups in particular timeframes. Cartoons do not only offer insight into certain emotions surrounding attitudes, but also into the beliefs and illustrations on which opinions are formed. They can show the historian what contemporaries considered important, as well as the connection between specific events, popular convictions, and public opinion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> T.M. Kennitz, 'The Cartoon as a Historical Source', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4:1, The Historian and the Arts (Summer 1973), 86.



## Chapter 1 Irish Immigration

During the 1860s, social scientist Friedrich Engels, shocked by the rapidly increasing number of Irish immigrants, argued: “If this goes on for another 30 years, there will be Irishmen only in America.” Evidently, Engels’s prediction was somewhat of an exaggeration and never came to pass. Yet, in 1906 a statement by another foreigner, French sculptor Paul Dubois, very much resembled the one Engels had made half a century ago. Dubois warned that “emigration will soon cause it to be said that Ireland is no longer where flows the Shannon, but rather beside the banks of the Hudson River, and in that ‘Greater Ireland’ whose home is in the American Republic.”<sup>18</sup> In retrospect, the Irish emigration of the nineteenth century turned out to be not nearly as awesome as Engels and Dubois had believed it to be. However, it did have great effects on the Irish, as well as on the Americans. A considerable number of Irish immigrants had settled in the United States before, but the enormous wave that arrived during the 1840s and 1850s caused some unease amongst the Americans. In this chapter I will study this second group of Irish immigrants in terms of their background, religion and social status. Moreover, I want to know why so many Americans considered them a challenge to their society during the nineteenth century.

The history of nineteenth-century-Ireland can be divided neatly into two distinct periods: the period preceding and the period following the Great Famine of 1845-1849. Prior to the Great Famine that split the century, there was already considerable emigration from Ireland. Between 1825 and 1830, more than 100,000 emigrants had left the country; the majority heading for North America and a small number to Australia and New Zealand. With regard to the costs of the journey, it is likely that these emigrants were the more well-to-do peasants and craftsmen who could afford the cost of the ticket and were in the position to pursue wealth and opportunity, seeking fortune and adventure rather than salvation. Although these early emigrant flows did contain some Catholics, the majority consisted out of Protestant Irish, who were literate and highly skilled. In later years, the majority of the emigrants would consist out of the poorest laborers, who were often Catholic, illiterate, and lacked self-reliance.<sup>19</sup>

During this time, Malthusian theories about overpopulation already had gained quite some popularity among English economists who were responsible for the administration of Ireland. Between 1825 and 1826, a British Parliamentary Commission had been set up that calculated the costs of ‘emigrating’ 1.8 million peasants out of Ireland. Many firm believers of the Malthusian theory argued that Ireland’s poverty resulted from its overpopulation, and practically welcomed the occurrence of the Great Famine. For example, Karl Marx reported to the *London Economist* on the subject of the

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<sup>18</sup> C. Ó Gráda, ‘A Note on Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration Statistics’, *Population Studies*, 29:1 (March 1975), 143.

<sup>19</sup> P. Jackson, ‘Women in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Irish Emigration’, *International Migration Review*, 18:4, Special Issue: Women in Migration (Winter 1984), 1004; C. Wittke, *The Irish in America* (New York 1956), 23; T. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York 1992), 4-5; Pearl, 174-175.

Famine: “The departure of the redundant part of the population of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland is an indispensable preliminary to every kind of improvement. The revenue of Ireland has not suffered in any degree from the famine.”<sup>20</sup>

Full-scale famine emigration started after the arrival of widespread potato blight in 1845. The blight was caused by a fungus which turned the leaves of the potatoes black, where after they fell apart. The potatoes themselves seemed healthy, however, soon after harvest they rotted. Peasants had no crop to sell, could not pay their rents and were evicted by their landlords. Many decided to move to other places in search of food and shelter, resulting in overcrowded roads full of desperate paupers. The countryside was completely disrupted: babies were abandoned and bodies were left unburied. Although one might expect starvation to be the number one cause of the thousands of deaths, it were actually diseases like typhus and cholera which eradicated whole families before emaciation even had set in. It is calculated that between 1841 and 1851 “the population fell by 20 percent resulting from death and emigration.”<sup>21</sup>

While a whole nation was suffering from disease and starvation, the English shipped an enormous amount of food out of the country that was more than sufficient to feed the whole population. The United States and several European countries sent humanitarian aid, but it had to be bought. And as no one had a job, therefore no money, the aid was completely useless. Peasants were driven off their land and were forced to work for their food by doing useless labor. Speculators bought up residual crops and exported those back to England. Many Irish nationalists accused the British of genocide. For example, John Mitchel claimed: “The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine.”<sup>22</sup> Even today, the lack of response and action of the British government remains a controversial point for historians and politicians. The failure of the potato crop in Ireland, the exportation of food crops and livestock, and the starvation of almost an entire country continues to spark debates whether this is considered genocide.<sup>23</sup>

The hunger and disease forced peasants to travel towards the harbors, hoping they could find a passage out of Ireland. The majority made the decision to emigrate on their own, but others were literally shipped out of the country by their landlords. English Poor Laws compelled landlords in Ireland to support their own tenants, however, in reality it stimulated landlords to ‘support’ their paupers by shipping them off to far countries, instead of supplying them with food and shelter. From 1846 onwards, landlord emigration started to take on greater proportions. Estates were cleared and

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson, ‘Women in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Irish Emigration’, 1004-1005.

<sup>21</sup> Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 6; Jackson, 1005.

<sup>22</sup> M. De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (London 2004), 84-85.

<sup>23</sup> C. Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond, The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (New Jersey 2000), 10; C.M. Eagan, “Still ‘Black’ and ‘Proud’: Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia”, in: D. Negra, *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* (London 2006), 42-44; Jackson, 1005.

tenants who failed to produce their rent were offered free or subsidized passages on hired vessels, shipping them off to North America, Australia, or New Zealand.<sup>24</sup>

It is often pointed out that famine emigration was a movement of households, rather than individuals. Whole families, or what was left of them, traveled to new continents and never expected to see Ireland again. Landlord emigration on such an immense scale had never happened before in Ireland, and the Great Famine can therefore be seen as a major turning point in Irish history. In the years following the Famine, the population reduced enormously. Millions of the poor and middle class Irish fled the country, leaving behind their grievances in devastated villages to find their luck elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

For some, the extent to which their emigration could be reversed was considered of great importance. Britain was often regarded as an attractive destination by those who planned to increase their wealth, where after they could return home in search for a new job. The journey was cheap and quick, and in case of disappointment the passage could easily be reversed, which was also often encouraged by the repatriation provisions of the Poor Law. The voyage to the United States was, however, quite expensive, could take months, and was less easily reversible. Yet, America provided enough opportunities for those planning to make their fortune and raise their social status before returning home to live their lives in reasonable wealth. Reverse migration from the U.S. was therefore not entirely uncommon.<sup>26</sup>

Although a ticket to America was more expensive than to Britain, the United States still formed the major destination for many Irishmen. By 1870 about three-fifths of the emigrants had settled there. The majority of emigrants leaving each county invariably headed for the United States; but the largest groups were found in counties along the Irish west coast. A study for the period 1876 to 1895 demonstrated that the Irish Americans originated from counties that were often considered 'backward.' It also stated that these counties had "many Irish-speakers, few Protestants, large agricultural populations and low farm valuation *per capita*."<sup>27</sup> Those who chose America as their destination often derived from counties that had lost large numbers of agricultural laborers within the three decades following the Famine. The majority of these laborers undoubtedly existed out of the peasants and occasional farm workers who had been hit the hardest by the potato blight. Accordingly, most of the Irish emigrants derived from regions in which rural society had been severely disrupted, and without hope for other agricultural job opportunities.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson, 1005-1006.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century', *Irish Historical Studies*, 22:86 (September 1980), 128-129; T.J. Hatton and J.G. Williamson, 'After the Famine: Emigration from Ireland, 1850-1913', *The Journal of Economic History*, 53:3 (September 1993), 576.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Emigration', 129.

<sup>28</sup> Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 7; Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Emigration', 129.

Considering the aforementioned information, it seems interesting that these poor ‘backward’ emigrants chose the more expansive voyage to the United States than the cheaper one to Britain. A partial explanation is offered by historian David Fitzpatrick. He argues that “the American emigration was largely a chain movement which greatly increased in scale during and soon after the Famine. Thousands of impoverished Irishmen arrived in the industrial cities of Britain at a moment of high unemployment and economic recession.”<sup>29</sup> The living circumstances in these cities were horrible, hardly better than at home. Many emigrants therefore decided to go on to the United States, often making use of cheap passages in dreadful conditions on cargo boats or ‘short ships’ that saved costs by avoiding the purview of the American Passenger Acts. These Acts, passed at the start of 1847, established standards for ships carrying passengers to the United States, and penalties for captains who did not follow these standards. British shipping laws, however, were not so strictly enforced. Ships in every shape and size were crammed full of people up to double each ship’s capacity. In one case, a ship full of Irish emigrants sailed out and almost immediately sank within sight of those on land who had just waved farewell to their loved ones. Thousands died at sea in overcrowded and unseaworthy ships without enough food or water, assigning the term ‘coffin ships’ to this means of transport.<sup>30</sup>

“Even though the United States also suffered from the economic recession during the mid-nineteenth century,” Fitzpatrick continues, “there was still enough demand for unskilled and casual labor to employ far more of the Irish immigrants than the British market could absorb.” Therefore, famine emigrants and other unfortunate souls continued to prefer the United States as their temporary or final destiny, also partially because their predecessors had proven America was the land of opportunity. “Thus the ‘initial exodus’ to the United States may be largely due to the fact that the Irish potato famine coincided with the industrial recession in Great Britain.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Arrival in the United States**

Initially, Americans were aware of two distinct groups of immigrants from Ireland in their coastal cities: educated and generally wealthy newcomers, some were Catholic but most were Protestant. However, after the massive immigrant influx of the Great Famine, the term ‘Irish’ became synonymous with poverty, crime, alcoholism and violence. As a New York Irishman observed: “If a swindler, thief, robber, or murderer, no matter what his color or country commit any abominable act, he is instantly set down as a native of Ireland.”<sup>32</sup> Several voices arose that were concerned with these

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<sup>29</sup> Fitzpatrick, 129.

<sup>30</sup> M. Miller Topp, ‘Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States, 1837-1877’, in: R.H. Bayor, *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History* (New York 2003), 65; Jackson, 1005; Fitzpatrick, 129; US Immigration Legislation Online, ‘1847 Passenger Act’, [http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/1847\\_Passenger\\_Law.html](http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/1847_Passenger_Law.html); The History Place, ‘Coffin Ships’, <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/coffin.htm> (2000)

<sup>31</sup> Fitzpatrick, 129.

<sup>32</sup> P.J. Blessing, ‘Irish emigration to the United States, 1800-1920: an overview’, in: P.J. Drudy, *The Irish in America: Emigration, Assimilation and Impact* (New York 1985), 29; M.R. Casey, ‘The Limits of Equality: Racial and Ethnic

rising numbers of destitute Irish wretches that seemed to be clustering together in the cities forming strongholds of ‘Romanism’, and in doing so, threatened the essence of ‘real Americanism’. What caused the American perception of the Irish to change so drastically during the first half the nineteenth century?

The growing number of immigrants increased xenophobia in the United States. As historian Donna Gabaccia rightfully points out: “In the aftermath of the American Revolution, many Americans, including most of its political elite, fervently believed that the new nation had isolated itself from its past as a colonized territory of Britain and from Europe’s ‘ancient ways.’”<sup>33</sup> However, as immigrant numbers started to increase – from 128,502 in the 1820s to over half a million in the 1830s and 1.4 million in the 1840s – and the U.S. started counting the arrivals, official statistics showed that at least half of the immigrants landing on the shores of the newly founded nation still originated from Great Britain. By 1850, when 2.2 million immigrants from Europe arrived in the United States, immigrants from Britain formed the largest group (1.3 million), along with immigrants from other British colonies as Canada and Ireland. Immigrants from British descent far outnumbered immigrants from European descent, as the Germans (583,774), the French (54,069), and African slaves (more than 100,000).<sup>34</sup> Especially the number of Irish immigrants increased considerably: from 54,338 during the 1820s to 914,119 during the 1850s, as is shown in *Table 1*.

*Table 1. Irish Immigration, 1820-1900.*<sup>35</sup>

<b>Decennial Period</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>1820 - 1830</b>	54.338
<b>1831 - 1840</b>	207.381
<b>1841 - 1850</b>	780.719
<b>1851 - 1860</b>	914.119
<b>1861 - 1870</b>	435.778
<b>1871 - 1880</b>	436.871
<b>1881 - 1890</b>	655.482
<b>1891-1900</b>	388.416
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.873.104</b>

Tensions in the New Republic, 1789-1836’, in: R.H. Bayor, *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History* (New York 2003), 53.

<sup>33</sup> Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> D.H. Akenson, ‘An Agnostic View of the Historiography of the Irish-Americans’, *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 132; Gabaccia, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Akenson, ‘An Agnostic View’, 132.

Gabaccia further argues that a quarter of the exceedingly rapid population growth of the United States was a result of mass immigration. The growing numbers caused the American belief in their isolation to wobble, as Americans began to reassess the foreign threats posed by immigrants. In doing so, they focused almost exclusively on immigrants from Asia and the peripheries of Europe. Gabaccia continues with stating that “fears of the corrupt politics and systems of government of northern and western Europe gave way to fears of the racially inferior and often colonized European residents of the German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Ottoman empires.” Moreover, “with the Irish and the French being largely Catholic, and the Canadians and Germans a mishmash of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, the majority of these European immigrants were already non-Protestant”, and therefore formed a threat to Americanism.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of the changing position of the United States in a progressing world, the persistent American myth of isolation started to weaken, and Americans were forced to recognize the fact that they had been ignoring immigrant foreign relations for too long. Personal experiences with colonization and information based on scientific racism lead many American citizens to believe that these new immigrants, like themselves, would refuse to abandon their foreignness. Americans began to regard immigrants as disrespectful of their laws and customs, even as potentially violent invaders. The same fears that had once spurred Americans to hold on to their isolation from the rest of the world, was now turned into hostility towards foreigners. Moreover, based on their own experiences as a colonizers, Americans feared that these immigrants, again like themselves, would refuse to adapt once they had arrived in the New World. After all, Americans also did not attempt to speak Spanish while travelling through Mexico, so why would these immigrants do it differently? This recognition of their own inability inevitably increased American suspicions with regard to newcomers, causing the level of xenophobia in America to rise exceedingly.<sup>37</sup>

These increasing suspicions expressed themselves in the fact that many Americans regarded immigrants as clustering. This notion was definitely true, as it has been reported that around 1850, many immigrants had clustered disproportionately in the industrial cities along the eastern coast, forming a visible presence. This conviction was especially accurate in the case of the Irish. From 1820 to 1900, the total number of Irish immigrants in the United States reached over 4 million, of whom 58 percent lived in the four states of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The cities Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, Boston, and San Francisco were heavily inhabited by Irish immigrants. Historian Carl Wittke has even pointed out that “for a long time, New York City has harbored more Irishmen than Dublin.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gabaccia, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 71-72.

<sup>38</sup> Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 23-24; Gabaccia, 73.

## **Urban Irish**

The history of the Irish in America is considered somewhat of a paradox. The Irish were rural people in Ireland and became city people in the United States. Why did they become an urban people? Historian Donald Akenson provides us with several related, interlocking points to explain this sudden preference for the urban life.

First, Akenson argues that the Irish arriving in the United States were often so broke that they could not directly head inland and were forced to stay in the coastal cities of the east. However, even when they did have the money, they could not have left the cities because of the fact that many Irish Americans lacked considerable agricultural skills. As a result of manorialism and serfdom back in Ireland, they had not been encouraged to develop these skills or gain any knowledge about farming. Therefore, the Irish were not suited for rural life in America.

Moreover, many historians believe that even if they had possessed agricultural skills, the Irish would not have chosen to farm as it reminded them of their negative experiences in Ireland. To the Irish, farming did not mean independence: it symbolized oppression, poverty, suffering, and possible starvation and eviction by their cruel British master.

Lastly, Akenson believes that the Irish were also culturally and socially unsuitable for rural life. They disliked the loneliness that often accompanied living on farms, and therefore preferred to reside in cities as those offered close, compatible neighbors and potential friendships. Furthermore, the Irish tended to stick together as a mode of self-defense against their rivals, but also in response to the narrow range of jobs available to them. And since the culmination of Irish immigration occurred simultaneously with the peak of the Know-Nothing movement, it undoubtedly united the urban Irish even more closely.<sup>39</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What made this second Irish group of immigrants stand out was not only the fact that they were forced to emigrate due to poor conditions at home, but also the high numbers of unskilled and uneducated laborers. In contrast to the earlier Protestant Irish immigrants, this group intended to stay, not in the first place because they had no means for to return. Furthermore, because of the pressing conditions in Ireland, whole families were forced to emigrate, while before the immigrant stream mainly consisted out of men, searching for adventure and trying to make a fortune before returning home or inviting their family. But most importantly, the majority of this second group was Catholic, a religion that was considered highly superstitious by many Americans.<sup>40</sup>

It seems quite obvious then, that the arrival of this immense Irish immigration flow was not welcomed by the Americans. Before the 1840s, the Irish were considered good people: hard working,

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<sup>39</sup> Akenson, 124-125; Fitzpatrick, 135-136; Wittke, 62-63.

<sup>40</sup> Anbinder, 7; Jackson, 1007-1008; Fitzpatrick, 128; Miller Top, 66; Wittke, 23.

skilled and educated. After the Famine, however, the Irish were often connected to poverty, crime, drunkenness and violence. Moreover, Americans saw the Irish as unwilling to assimilate, unwilling to be 'Americanized.' According to them, this resistance was seen in their desperate clustering in cities, their clinging to their own Irish language and worst of all, to their Catholic faith.<sup>41</sup> What made these Irish stand out in the eyes of the Americans was the fact that they believed themselves to be different, and therefore refused to adopt the American habits and traditions.

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<sup>41</sup> Gabaccia, 71-73; Akenson, 125.



## Chapter 2 Nativism

American politics have never been completely free of nativism. However, during the 1850s, America experienced one of its most persistent and violent periods of nativism in history. Although the United States had always welcomed new arrivals, expressions of xenophobia began to rise. Some feared immigrants so much that they accused foreign governments of encouraging and organizing mass immigration for the establishment of new colonies as a war strategy, in which immigrants served as soldiers or invaders. This view resulted in increasing fear of paupers, but also in extreme anti-Catholic prejudice among American Protestants of British origin.<sup>42</sup> In this chapter I want to find out what exactly caused this extreme forms of nativism and xenophobia to rise, how these sentiments were expressed and how they affected Irish immigrants.

American nativism grew as a result of political changes and the massive increase in immigration flows. During the 1850s, old political parties started to fall apart. The Whigs were losing ground, the Democratic Party split, and the Republican Party was born. Important issues about abolition and secession confused voters, so new standpoints were very much welcomed. Moreover, the enormous wave of European immigrants that had arrived in the decades before, the behavior of some of those immigrants, the fact that they could vote and that their vote often was controlled by political machines (like Tammany Hall), and their extreme clustering in American cities led some Americans to believe that the immigrants were threatening the essence of Americanism. Some even went so far to argue that their taxes would increase to support the filthy, diseased foreigners that refused to adapt and did not understand the concept of honest voting. This growing anti-immigrant sentiment inevitably resulted in the organization of a secret political party, known as the Know-Nothing nativist American Party.<sup>43</sup>

The Know-Nothing Party, founded in 1843, was initially named the Order of the Star Spangled Banner or the American (Republic) Party, but thanked its nickname to its distinct secrecy: when asked about their standpoints, members always had to respond with “I know nothing.”<sup>44</sup> Although the nativists attacked immigrants in general, they especially targeted the Irish, who according to them, refused to be Americanized. This could only be remedied if the Irish were surrounded by enough Americans, so that the process of Americanization would speed up. But for most Americans, the fact that the Irish were so very loyal to the Catholic Church was even more frightening. As Irish immigration increased, the American attitude towards Catholicism changed quickly. Before the 1830s, there was little concern about Catholics, but during and after the 1830s people were less understanding. The Irish came to be seen as unadaptable, and as loyal subjects of a

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<sup>42</sup> Gabaccia, 76; Wittke, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Wittke, 114; Gabaccia, 76; Miller Topp, 66.

<sup>44</sup> F. Verhagen, *Ooggetuigen van de Amerikaanse Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2008), 99; Anbinder, x.

belligerent church that believed in the divine mission of the Irish to convert the United States to Catholicism.<sup>45</sup>

Nativists had several reasons for disliking the Irish, which are provided by Carl Wittke. The first annoyance of the nativists was the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century the Irish had gained quite some influence in urban politics, something that was feared by many Americans. It was believed that the active Irish participation in politics would undermine American institutions as a result of a group that voted as one man and in doing so, threatened the whole concept of free elections. Moreover, nativists felt that the Irish were hindering political reform, particularly with regard to issues of abolitionism, temperance, and women's rights. It was argued that the Irish were too conservative and too slow for reform, while abolitionists believed Catholicism to be an obstacle for freedom.

Another reason for this extreme aversion is found in the nativist conviction that the Irish were lowering the American standard of labor. Irish labor competition was resented by many Americans, and they accused Britain of purposely ditching the Irish and for letting the United States deal with the problem. Others believed the Catholic Church, and especially the Jesuits, encouraged Catholic paupers to immigrate as a means to undermine the economic foundation of the country so the United States would be more open to complete conversion.

Conservative Americans were annoyed by the insolent requests of political refugees for a new American foreign policy in which the U.S. would abandon its isolation and neutrality to intervene in Europe and liberate suppressed groups. The Germans were the most active in this matter, aside from the Irish whose country of origin was still under British control and who hoped to free their fellow countrymen from their new residence.

But the most important reason for the Know-Nothing violence was the enormous fear of the Catholic Church. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church had relatively few members. This changed, however, drastically throughout the nineteenth century, when the church grew out into one of the largest religious organizations in the United States. Wittke points out that the number of Roman Catholics grew immensely from 663,000 in 1840 to 1.6 million a decade later. At least half of this unanticipated expansion in membership was caused by immigration, of which over 500,000 originated from Ireland. The number of Irish Catholics in the United States was estimated at one million in 1850, to which another 602,000 were added the following decade.<sup>46</sup>

The massive expansion of the Catholic Church was viewed with dismay by many American Protestants, who believed that Protestantism was responsible for the freedom and prosperity that the nation's inhabitants enjoyed. Furthermore, it reestablished deeply embedded British prejudices of the Irish being inherently rebellious and superstitious, and who blindly followed the pope and the Catholic Church, instead of giving their loyalty to the United States. These subjugated immigrants would

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<sup>45</sup> Wittke, 115.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 88-90 and 115-117.

become American voters and with that, a large group of potential traitors. Moreover, controversies over education and excessive attacks upon Protestantism by Catholic leaders did the Church and the Irish little good, and nativists gladly made use of this. T.E. Bond, a prominent member of the Know-Nothing Party, for instance, maintained that “the Church is of necessity tolerant. Heresy she endures when and where she must,” but if Catholics even should gain a large majority, “religious freedom in this country is at an end; so say our enemies – so say we.”<sup>47</sup> Other anti-Catholic writers released numerous pamphlets and books that accused Catholic priests of bigotry, immorality, and even pornography. It was, for example, believed that convents provided the setting for illicit sex, which inevitably led to the reference of brothels as ‘nunneries.’ Catholics believed they had to respond to these charges, and so the battle on the issue whether Catholicism and Americanism were compatible began, in which the Irish often formed the main target of the attack.<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, the Know-Nothing Party did not achieve very much. Their political program pleaded for the exclusion of poor people and criminals, and for the naturalization of foreigners before they received the right to vote or to require land. The movement further opposed the ultramontane attitude of the Catholic Church, demanded office holding to be exclusively for native-born Americans, preferred a twenty-one year residence requirement for naturalization, and promoted Bible-reading as compulsory in children’s education. From 1854 to 1856, the Know Nothings registered local successes in elections in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Massachusetts, but also in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Louisiana. About a hundred Know Nothings went to Congress and at least seven states had governors and legislatures either openly or secretly committed to the principles of the movement. However, the Party split over the slavery controversy, and during the Civil War, America welcomed immigrants even more in the hope they would join the fight. After the Civil War, Know-Nothingism revived, though their resentment was now directed against new immigrants. Nonetheless, the Irish kept being attacked due to their unceasing loyalty to the Catholic Church. Yet, the immediate effect of Know-Nothingism on the Irish was the opposite of what the Party intended: it made them more nationalistic and loyal to the Democratic Party. Moreover, instead of speeding up assimilation, the attacks by the nativists rather delayed the process and caused the Irish Americans to unify even more.<sup>49</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although American nativism and xenophobia seems extreme and quite irrational to us today, it is important to understand the basis for this anxiety. In the eyes of many Americans, the arrival of radical immigrants was the main reason for the demise of their cherished American isolation, and with that the rise of an American empire. Moreover, the fact that a large number of these immigrants were

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<sup>47</sup> T.E. Bond, ‘The Know Nothings’, in: *The Wide-awake Gift. A Know-Nothing Token for 1855*, edited by ‘one of ‘em (New York 1855), 59; Gabaccia, 76; Wittke, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Anbinder, xiii, 106 and 114-115; Gabaccia, 76; Wittke, 118-119.

<sup>49</sup> Wittke, 121-122; Miller Topp, 66-67; Verhagen, 99.

Catholic, a religion that was dictated by a foreign government, did not sit well either. This xenophobia resulted in demands for immigration restrictions, as well as the rapid growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the early twentieth century. Even during the presidential election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, the *New York Times* stated that “millions of voters are certain to be cast for and against the Democratic candidate because of his church.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, as Gabaccia points out, what was new by the second half of the nineteenth century was American’s growing realization of these developments and their conviction of politically active immigrants forming a threat to their way of life. Although German immigrants formed one of the major threats due to their political activity, the Irish contributed also greatly to this fear by organizing themselves for the cause of saving Ireland. Nativism, however, did not affect Irish Americans much socially, as it made them even more determined to stick together and hang on to their beliefs, but it did, however, affect them in the way they were viewed and portrayed by many Americans,<sup>51</sup> as is shown in the next chapters.

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<sup>50</sup> Gabaccia, 76

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, 76 and 82; Wittke, 122.

## Chapter 3 Physiognomy and stereotyping

Nativism was persistent during the nineteenth century in the United States. Although immigrants of all origins formed the target of the group's discontent, the Irish seemed to be reprimanded the most. This hostility towards the Irish was not new. Its foundation had been laid in Great Britain as a result of colonialism and the upcoming sciences in combination with Social Darwinism. For the British, the word 'Irish' was inevitably connected to the word 'uncivilized.' In their view, the Irish were aggressive, simian, and, worst of all, anti-British. Moreover, the Irishman formed an easy target for both foreign and native political activists because of his so-called submissive attitude and superstitious religion. As a result, the Irish were often depicted in cartoons with simian or pig-like features demonstrating their position as colonial subjects of the English. The classic Irishman was often described as "careless, scruffy, and unambitious; feeding on potatoes, living in pig-sties, doting on superstition, and multiplying like rabbits."<sup>52</sup> In this chapter, English cartoon depictions of the Irish will be analyzed in their historical context to answer the question of how the stereotypical Irishman came to be and to understand the underlying working processes that influenced this negative way of thinking about the Irish.

Racial conceptions of Irish identity were the product of new scientific studies developed in Europe during the nineteenth century. Assumptions about the physical and mental characteristics of mankind increased Victorian prejudices about the 'inferior races', which not only referred to the Irish, but to Negroes and other non-Anglo-Saxons as well. Yet, the Irish continued to form the main target of British attacks as a result of the conviction that the Irish and the English were unrelated because of conflicting differences in religion, culture, and character. It was even believed that these qualities made the Irish Celt part of a completely different race with distinct features and behavior that did not come even close to resembling the Anglo-Saxon race. These ideas derived from upcoming forms of evolutionary discourses associated with Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, Thomas Huxley, and their followers. The scientific basis they provided contributed to the polarization of the English and the Irish, as it was now 'scientifically proven' that characteristics such as violence, poverty, and alcoholism were typical for the Irish race. Moreover, according to many Victorians, these typical Irish traits could only be changed through the mixing of races, although no Briton would have liked to see that actually being realized.<sup>53</sup>

A very important reason for the English to believe they were separated from the Irish was based on religious convictions. The new scientific reason that developed in Britain ran counter to the

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<sup>52</sup> Forker, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, 2 and 21; K. Kenny, 'Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century,' in J.J. Lee and M.R. Casey, *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States* (New York 2006), 366; M. De Nie, 'British Conceptions of Ireland and Irishness in the Nineteenth Century', *History Compass* 3 (2005), 1; Forker, 60.

Roman Catholic faith, which was considered “a religion of charms, magical relics, fraudulent miracles, exorcism, and swarms of saints.”<sup>54</sup> As a consequence of these suspicions and objections, many educated and middle class Britons believed Catholicism to be a system that was fundamentally destructive to British society. Similarly, typically Irish traits such as laziness, ungratefulness, unreasonableness, and other negative characteristics, could now be logically explained as well. Together these traits formed the core of Irish identity as seen from a British point of view and at the same time, formed the exact opposite of the Anglo-Saxon identity.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, since prejudices in English discourse based upon religious and social differences had been popular for so long with regard to Irish Catholics, it was quite easy for some Victorians to conclude that the relative scarcity of skilled workers among the Irish was definite proof that the Irish indeed were an inferior people with a lack of self-reliance and therefore unfit for self-government.<sup>56</sup>

The construction of offensive comparisons between the ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ races could have been the end of it. But some Victorians, both in England and in the United States, went further by finding what they believed to be simian or even anthropoid features in the Irish character. In both cartoons and novels, Paddy increasingly started to resemble the chimpanzee, orangutan, and gorilla. By the 1860s and 70s, the transformation of the Irishman into a simianized creature was complete.<sup>57</sup>

### **Physiognomy**

The practice of physiognomy was not a new phenomenon. The attribution of physical and mental traits to any given type of man can be traced back to classical antiquity, when theories about human nature and behavior first appeared. In stereotyping it is necessary to assign the individual or group in question a set of unique, recognizable features, and physiognomy can help with this process. Physiognomy is regarded as the science of judging character by studying the features of the head and face, the body, and the extremities, and can be considered as an alternative for other sciences, like astrology, palm-reading, or medical examination. By the early nineteenth century, physiognomical ideology had found its way into popular scientific folklore, and already had many enthusiast European practitioners who used it as a means to ‘read’ their friends, neighbors, and, perhaps most importantly, foreigners.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Forker, 60; Curtis, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Curtis, 15; Forker, 60.

<sup>56</sup> M. De Nie, ‘British Conceptions of Ireland and Irishness in the Nineteenth Century’, 1; Curtis, 13-15; M. De Nie, ‘The Famine, Irish Identity, and the British Press’, *Irish Studies Review*, 6:1 (April 25, 2008), 27.

<sup>57</sup> Curtis, 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Pearl, 181; Curtis, 5.

Fragments of physiognomy quickly found their way into criminal anthropology.

Physiognomists had always been keen to discover violent and criminal tendencies in facial features, and during the 1870s, the studies of anthropologist Francis Galton were the first that led directly to the examination of criminals. Galton designed a taxonomy of human types through several anthropometric



Figure 1. Francis Galton, 'Illustrations of Composite Portraiture, The Jewish Type.' April 17, 1885. Source: *The Photographic News*.

and psychometric tests, including composite pictures of murders and thieves, as well as Jewish and phthisic or tubercular types, which concluded that the face indeed contained features that demonstrated the criminal, ethnic, or pathological tendencies of an individual (Figure 1). Consequently, his researches suggested that men were born criminals, common soldiers or officers, inherently superior or inferior, and that they could not do a thing about it.<sup>59</sup> Galton's work on

composite stereotypes influenced the work of the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, whose classic study, *L'Uomo delinquente* (1876), represented a collection of sociology, psychology, penology, physical anthropology, and physiognomy. Lombroso hoped to detect a possible relationship between criminal psychopathology and physical or constitutional defect. The main point of his study was to prove the existence of a hereditary, or returning, class of criminal that was in possession of a set characteristics from a more primitive stage in human evolution. Lombroso believed that those criminals demonstrated a higher percentage of physical and mental abnormalities than non-criminals, such as unusual skull sizes and asymmetrical facial features (Figure 2). Lombroso's investigation of the causes of political and social crime had an enormous influence on his contemporaries and other scholars. Moreover, the emergence of increasingly quantitative and ethnocentric forms of physical anthropology provided many Victorians with scientific proof for their conviction that they indeed were part of the superior races.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> J.C. Kenna, 'Sir Francis Galton's Contribution to Anthropology', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 94:2 (July – December 1964), 80; Unknown, 'Sir Francis Galton', *The British Medical Journal*, 1:2612 (January 21, 1911), 157; Curtis, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Curtis, 12-13; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Cesare Lombroso', <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/346759/Cesare-Lombroso> (April 26, 2015); A. Albrecht, 'Cesare Lombroso. A Glance at His Life Work,' *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 1:2 (July, 1910), 72-74.

In light of this, one can understand that the Victorian image of the Irish was heavily influenced by nineteenth century scientific thinking. No matter where the physiognomized groups or individuals came from, these images tended to increase the viewer's self-esteem by putting down those being stereotyped. European and British anthropologists gladly gave their scientific authority to these stereotypes because they sufficed to the popular conservative discourse of their time. It seems logical then, that the Irishman found himself positioned closer to the Negro than to the Anglo-Saxon in the evolutionary tree, especially given the amount of prejudice against the Irish in Great Britain.<sup>61</sup>

The increasing political activities of the Irish reinforced their inferior status. The assumption that Britons and Irishmen were divided as a consequence of particular ethnic, racial, religious and cultural barriers was intensified by political events in both countries. The political, social and agrarian unrest the English often found in Ireland, combined with the radical behavior of some Irishmen in Britain, helped to confirm the belief of many Victorians that the Irish were a completely different race, or at least some subgroup of people with habits that were entirely distinct from English customs. Every rebellion or scandal provided the English with more proof that the stereotype of the Irish as an ignorant and superstitious ape-like creature was clearly based on nothing but the truth.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, the tendency of English newspapers to report these Irish affairs under the guise of 'Special Crime', which indicated offenses arising out of agrarian and political motives, led many Victorians to conclude that the Irish were actually born as criminals and anarchists. It also helped to explain the outbreak of Fenian activities from the 1860s to the mid-1880s. During these twenty years, the English image of the politicized Irishman turned more monstrous and simian. Interestingly, these were also the decades when tens of thousands of post-famine Irish immigrants started to make their

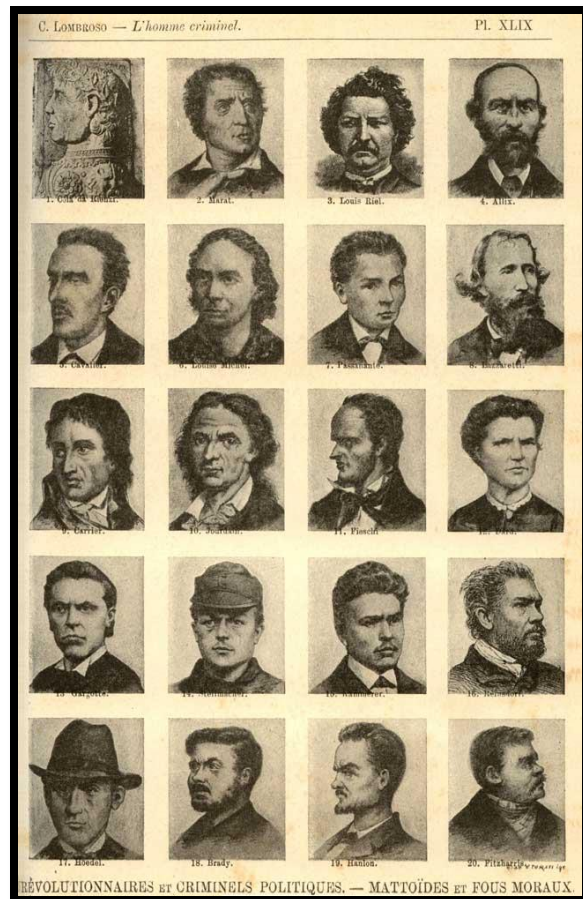


Figure 2. Cesare Lombroso, 'Physical characteristics of criminals.' Source: *The New Inquiry* (March 7, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Curtis, 14-15 and 21.

<sup>62</sup> Forker, 60; M. De Nie, 'British Conceptions of Ireland and Irishness in the Nineteenth Century', 2; M. De Nie, 'The Famine, Irish Identity, and the British Press', *Irish Studies Review*, 6:1 (April 25, 2008), 32; Curtis, 21; J.J. Appel, 'From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in Puck, 1876-1910', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13:4 (October 1971), 372.



political presence felt in Great Britain. While radical Irish nationalists began to organize themselves into constitutional parties and secret revolutionary brotherhoods, the portrayals of the Irish in cartoons and novels turned more simian with particular violent and criminal cues. The result of the increasing Irish political activity and agrarian protest was them being turned into gorilla's, Frankenstein and other mythical monsters.<sup>63</sup>

### **Caricatures**

The science of physiognomy greatly influenced the art of caricature. According to historian Lewis Perry Curtis, physiognomy and caricatures can be considered inseparable as stereotyping is essential to any form of prejudice. Political caricature can even be defined as “a pattern of stereotypes that have been influenced by the science of physiognomy and serving a satirical function.” Some aspects of caricatures may be considered timeless, however, Curtis reminds us that there were certain values and beliefs that were quite unique in the mid-nineteenth century, and found their way into the faces of the Irish and several other minority groups.<sup>64</sup>

One might wonder what the difference is between a cartoon and a caricature, but this is often a matter of taste. The word ‘caricature’ derived from the seventeenth-century Italian word *caricature* or *caricare*, “to load or exaggerate”, and is considerably older than the popular meaning of cartoon, that indicates a comic drawing, which dates roughly from the 1840s. Some argue that caricature often stresses the distorted quality of the message, while others point to the comic content of cartoons. However, these two elements are frequently combined in the same drawing, especially in the political cartoons of the Victorian era, often resulting in both cruel and absurd, pathetic and provoking illustrations. The term ‘caricature’ may sound more refined than ‘cartoon’, but there is little difference, particularly to the Irish who regularly formed the target of British satire.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Justice, ‘Thomas Nast and the Public School of the 1870s’, 177; Curtis, 21-22.

<sup>64</sup> Curtis, 24, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast*, 3; Justice, 173; Curtis, 23-24.

During the nineteenth century, the stereotypical Paddy in English caricature changed significantly. Throughout the Elizabethan and Stuart period the features of the Irishman could be considered regular, even quite handsome. During the reign of George III, the faces of the Irish peasants appearing in prints began to look more brutish and scruffy. The Victorian stereotype of the Irishman, however, started to carry far more resemblance to an ape than to a man. In less than a century, Paddy had become a monstrous Celtic criminal, capable of anything vicious and beastly. By the 1860s no reputable reader of comic weeklies could possibly mistake the simous nose, long upper lip, projecting mouth, extended lower jaw, and sloping forehead for any other undesirable, dangerous human being than the Irishman.<sup>66</sup>

The simianization of the Irishman roughly took place between 1840 and 1890, with the 1860s serving as a turning point in the alteration of the stereotype. This simianized version of the Irishman lasted well into the twentieth century in both the United States and England, but eventually disappeared after the rebellion and recurring warfare of the IRA in the 1910s and 1920s. As aforementioned, the foundations of this stereotype grew out of the widespread British belief that the Irish were inherently inferior and quite unfit for self-rule. The changes in Paddy's features during the mid-nineteenth century suggest a change in attitude among many Victorians about the Irish.<sup>67</sup> To study this change, we have to analyze several influential English caricaturists and some of their most important cartoons with regard to the simianization and stereotyping of Paddy.

In the late eighteenth century Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray laid the groundwork for the stereotyping of Paddy.<sup>68</sup> These caricaturists were well-known for their drawings of Georgian society as well as King George III and his politicians. Furthermore, they occasionally drew faces which can be considered the beginnings of the simianized Fenian of the 1860s and after, although it is important to note that Rowlandson's and Gillray's prognathous faces at first did not refer to any ethnic or national identity in particular. Such recognizable features were often meant to express the 'barbaric'



Figure 3. James Gillray. 'London Corresponding Society Alarmed'. April 20, 1798. Source: National Portrait Gallery. Gillray's protosimian radicals or republican Jacobins in England conspire to subvert the government.

<sup>66</sup> Curtis, 29; Justice, 177.

<sup>67</sup> Kenny, 'Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century,' in: *Making the Irish American*, 366; M. De Nie, 'British Conceptions of Ireland and Irishness in the Nineteenth Century', 1; Curtis, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Keller, *The Art and Politics*, 4.

crowd, especially the primitive tendencies of the politicized mob, and thus did not particularly apply to a specific race or place of origin (Figure 3). Thus, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, these ape-like features lacked any specific national identity, yet became increasingly associated with the disturbances of the Irish against English taxes, for Catholic emancipation, and later for the emancipation of Ireland. Moreover, because pigs played such an important role in the Irish peasant economy and the notion of the ‘swinish’ mob was widespread, it was very alluring for caricaturists to compare Irish rebels with the starving pigs of the countryside and to adorn Irish rebels with pig snouts. Accordingly, there was nothing specifically Irish about a projecting lower jaw until the 1840s, when thousands of Irish immigrants poured into England as a result of the Famine. While these wretches flocked into the cities, creating Irish slums and disturbing the order, the English

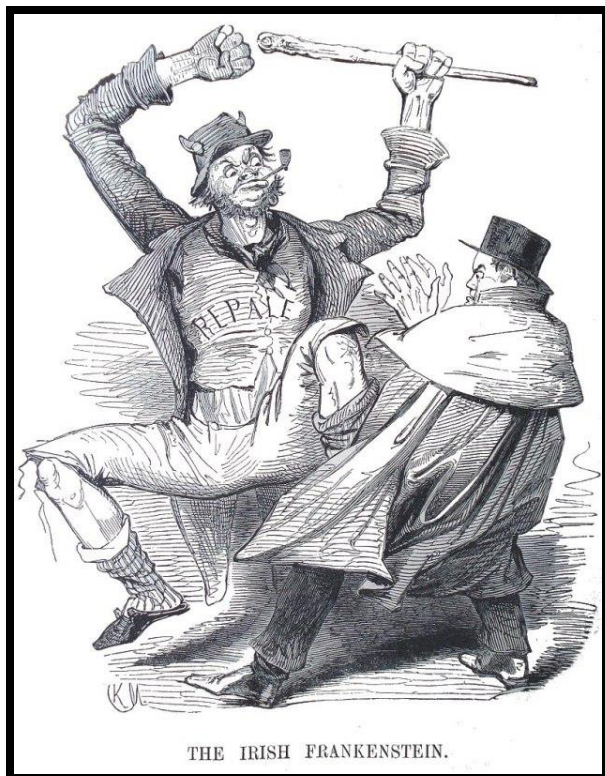


Figure 4. Joseph Kenny Meadows, ‘The Irish Frankenstein.’ November 4, 1843. Source: *Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive*.

flaring nostrils and projecting lower lip, ‘Frankenstein’ hardly resembled a gorilla or an orangutan. However, the first step was made.<sup>70</sup>

Another important cartoonist for the magazine was John Leech, who drew many of the principal cartoons in the 1840s and 1850s and very often ridiculed the Irish physiognomy. An interesting fact, given that Leech’s father was from Irish descent. Nevertheless, he did not refrain from resorting to simian metaphors with regard to the Irish in his cartoons. Particularly the militancy

actually started to notice them. It was during the 1840s that the Irish, and particularly the more politicized among them, became the favorite target of cartoonists and the prognathous face became more and more identified with the Irish peasant, regardless of individual political positioning.<sup>69</sup>

One of the most influential magazines in the development of the simianized Irishman was *Punch, Or the London Charivari*, launched in 1841. *Punch*’s leading cartoonist in the early years was Joseph Kenny Meadows, who drew the first feature cartoon of an ‘Irish Frankenstein’ in the issue of November 4, 1843 (Figure 4). Meadow’s effort to mock the repeal movement demonstrates the movement towards the direction of a simianized Paddy. Despite its

<sup>69</sup> Curtis, 30-31; M. De Nie, ‘Pigs, Paddies, prams and petticoats: Irish Home Rule And the British comic press, 1886-93’, *History Ireland*, 1:13 (January/February 2005) <http://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/pigs-paddies-prams-and-petticoats-irish-home-rule-and-the-british-comic-press-1886-93/>

<sup>70</sup> Keller, 4; Curtis, 31-32.

of the Young Ireland movement during the 1850s inspired Leech to turn one of the radical leaders of the organization, John Mitchel, completely into a monkey,<sup>71</sup> In the cartoon ‘The British Lion and the Irish Monkey’, published on April 8, 1848, Mitchel was portrayed as an angry little monkey, thus completely dehumanizing him by turning him into an animal rather than into a man with simianized features (*Figure 5*).

Wearing a jester’s cap and carrying two pistols in his belt, the monkey confronts the imperial British lion towering over him, while exclaiming: “One of us MUST be Put Down.” The cartoon comments on the unrest leading up to the 1848 Irish rebellion. In this drawing, Leech makes use of visual metaphor to control and manipulate public opinion, and in doing so, emphasizes the inferiority



Figure 5. John Leech, ‘The British Lion and the Irish Monkey.’ April 8, 1848. Source: *Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive*.

of the Irish opposed to the superiority of the British. Mitchel, portrayed as a small monkey, and the lion, are both standing on a cliff facing each other, the cliffs symbolizing the Irish and the English coast. The immense power of the English cannot only be seen in the symbol of the lion, but in the ship of the Royal Navy in the background as well. This statement is further underlined by the crown on the lion’s head, and by placing the emphasis of the Irishman’s foolishness through the jester’s cap on the monkey’s head and the insignificant spear in its left hand. The silly, primitive spear can obviously never defeat the superiority of the British military.<sup>72</sup>

Leech’s infamous cartoon ‘A Great Time for Ireland’ also clearly demonstrates the simianization of the Irish during the second half of the nineteenth century. Leech’s cartoon of Mr. G. O’Rilla appeared in *Punch* in December 1861, accompanying an article quoting calls for Irish independence made in the Irish newspaper the *Nation*.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘John Leech’, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/334649/John-Leech> (April 26, 2015); Curtis, 31-34; M. De Nie, ‘The Famine, Irish Identity, and the British Press’, 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> Forker, 62; Curtis, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Pearl, 189; G. Fraser, ‘The Lutfur Rahman Verdict and the Spectre of “Undue Spiritual Influence”’, *The Guardian* (April 29, 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/29/lutfur-rahman-tower-hamlets-may-or-verdict-undue-spiritual-influence>



Figure 6. John Leech, 'A Great Time for Ireland.' December 1861. Source: *Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive*.

“Yes, then will the forces of England find in their front such desperate men as crushed their ranks at Fontenoy to the cry of ‘Remember Limerick.’ Yes, the men crowbarred out of their homes in Ireland; the men oppressed, insulted, scoffed at, and, wherever they went, pursued by English slander, scorn, and hate – those men will be in the van of the fight, and then will woo come to England! And what of Ireland in this great time? What will Irishmen do when comes this supreme opportunity, the like of which can only come once in many ages? We can tell what they may do, what they will be able to do, if they act well their part as brave men, - they can, most certainly, establish the independence of Ireland.”

The cartoon then states: “And here is a portrait of the Author,” followed by a cartoon of a gorilla sitting in a chair, writing this ‘treason’ in the newspaper with a quill (*Figure 6*). At the bottom of the cartoon is stated: “Mr. G. O’Rilla, the Young Ireland Party, exulting over the Insult to the British Flag. Shouldn’t he be extinguished at once?”<sup>74</sup> Mr. G. O’Rilla seems to invite the fully human Britons to enact their repressive measures based on the popular notion that “it is only an animal.”<sup>75</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, Leech continued to draw several more cartoons of Irish monsters, whose huge jaws, long upper lips, and simous noses clearly demonstrated his opinion with regard to the Irishmen who protested against their conditions and British rule.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive, [http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000NY.JRh4dk\\_0](http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000NY.JRh4dk_0)

<sup>75</sup>J. Miller, ‘R.M. Ballantyne and Mr. G. O.’Rilla’, in: *Romantic Ireland: From Tone to Gonne; Fresh Perspective on Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013), 407.

<sup>76</sup> Curtis, 34.

The draftsman who did most to change the Irish stereotype in English cartoons from human to beast was John Tenniel. While other cartoonists had increased Paddy's prognathism or lowered his facial angle, they had kept him fairly human. However, during the 1860s, Tenniel's Paddy began to look rather like a monstrous ape than a man. This change in appearance was a result of the emergence of Fenianism, a revolutionary Irish republican movement whose members swore to end British rule in Ireland by means of physical force. Fenian attacks on Irish villages and police stations in the late 1860s, proved for the British that the movement revealed the depraved and violent character of the Irish and this feeling inspired many cartoons in comic weeklies. Tenniel and his fellow draftsmen

made frequent use of the classical theme of Beauty (often embodied by Hibernia or Erin) being rescued from the claws of the Beast (Fenianism) by a handsome Prince or St. George (the symbol of Law and Order). Tenniel perceived those who challenged British authority in Ireland as outright scum, and turned them into ape-like creatures, thus passing Paddy from prognathism into simianism.<sup>77</sup>

One of Tenniel's best examples of this is demonstrated in his cartoon 'The Fenian Guy Fawkes' (Figure 7).<sup>78</sup> He drew it after the bombing at Clerkenwell and Manchester on December 13, 1867, when members of the Fenian movement tried to liberate some of their imprisoned leaders and caused a bloodbath. The cartoon shows a simianized Fenian sitting astride on a barrel of gunpowder in the middle of a crowd of innocent children, and a mother feeding her baby in the background. He has just lit the fuse, which suggests the Irish are monstrous, inhuman, heartless, and stubborn. They do not fear death when they feel the need to destroy. While playing on old anti-Catholic prejudices in his new version of the gunpowder plot, in Tenniel's stereotype of a Fenian dynamiter the degree of prognathism is increased to the extreme.<sup>78</sup> The cartoon soon became quite popular as a symbol of

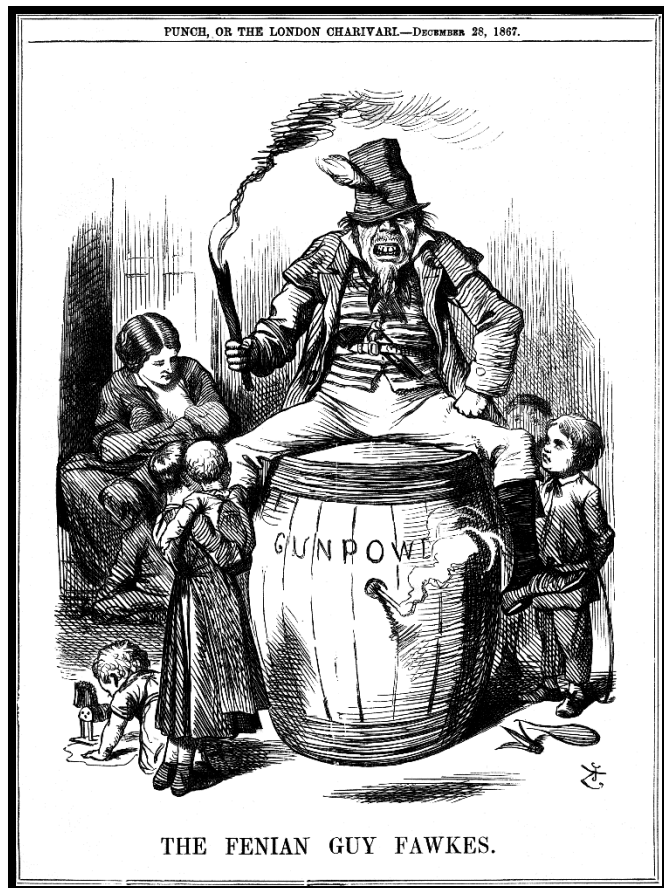


Figure 7. John Tenniel, 'The Fenian Guy Fawkes.' December 28, 1867. Source: *Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive*.

<sup>77</sup> Keller, 4; Forker, 62-63; Curtis, 37-38.

<sup>78</sup> Forker, 63; M. Van Nie, *The Eternal Paddy*, 163-164; Curtis, 37 and 39; History House, 'Clerkenwell prison escape', (August 7, 2015) [http://www.historyhouse.co.uk/articles/clerkenwell\\_prison\\_escape.html](http://www.historyhouse.co.uk/articles/clerkenwell_prison_escape.html) (2014)

stereotypical thick-headed Irishness and was used again for the same purpose in 1871 by American cartoonist Thomas Nast, as we will see in the next chapter.



Figure 8. Detail 'Two Forces.'

shows Britannia protecting a crying Hibernia from a stone-throwing Irish anarchist. While standing on the Irish Land League organization and holding the sword of justice, Britannia shows that she will pursue Irish criminal conspirators according to law.<sup>79</sup> The anarchist is of course richly endowed with repellent ape-like features, like a simous nose, long, projecting upper lip, a shallow and hairy lower jaw, and fang-like teeth (Figure 9).

Moreover, in his classic version of 'The Irish Frankenstein', inspired by Joseph Kenny Meadow, Tenniel clearly demonstrates the physiognomical comparison between a monstrous appearance and the supposed inherent barbaric character of the Irish. The simianized killer, who is carrying a pistol and bloody dagger, stands next to a death notice signed by Charles Stuart Parnell, the legendary leader and organizer of Irish agrarian crime. He has

completely lost control over his own Fenian monster, like Doctor Frankenstein in the original story

During the 1870s, *Punch* started to focus more on English and European politics, and Tenniel drew fewer ape-like Irishmen. This changed, however, towards the end of the decade because of the rise of a more militant form of Irish nationalism. A series of events involving radical Irish politicians motivated many English cartoonists to turn Paddy even more ferociously into a monstrous ape-man. Tenniel also contributed to this rise of simianization with his cartoon 'Two Forces' (Figure 8). The illustration, a traditional confrontation between good and evil,



Figure 8. John Tenniel, 'Two Forces'. October 29, 1881. Source: Getty Images.

<sup>79</sup> Curtis, 37-38 and 41; M. De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy*, 242-245.

(Figure 10). Tenniel's monster is a perfect example of the dehumanization of the fictitious enemy. Moreover, the portrayed assault of the Frankenstein monster demonstrates the victimization of an ethnic group and can be seen as a representation, or even visualization, of the victim's fear of the

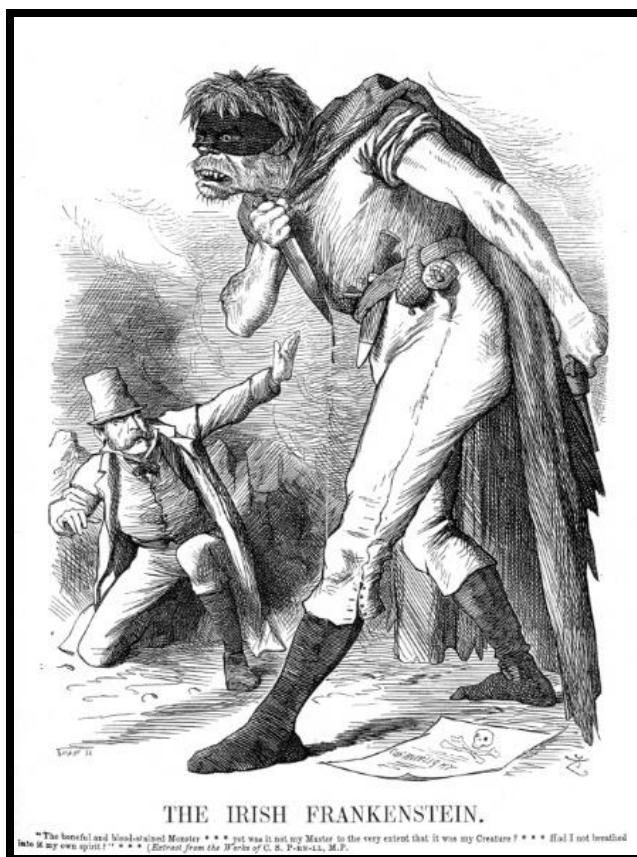


Figure 10. John Tenniel, 'The Irish Frankenstein.' May 20, 1882.  
Source: *Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive*.

many fellow cartoonists in Europe and the United States, especially after the emergence of the Fenian movement during the 1860s. We will see more of this influence in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

The combination of British colonialism, the upcoming sciences, and the politicization of the Irish in both Ireland and England increased the hostile attitude among the English towards the Irish. The racial conceptions of the Irish were the result of upcoming scientific reason that spurred Victorian prejudices about 'superior' and 'inferior' races, and continually reinforced due to the rising number of assumptions and principles about the physical and mental traits of the human race. For the Irish, this way of thinking meant they were considered even less a part of the British ethnicity than they ever had been, as it was the conviction for many British Victorians that Englishmen and Irishmen were separated from one another as a result of conflicting differences in religion, culture, and behavior. In short, in the eyes of the English, characteristics as violence, poverty, laziness, drunkenness,

alleged assault, in this case the fear of Irish leaders for an Irish revolt. The monster of Frankenstein proved to be a popular image as it was reissued several times during the nineteenth century as a means to criticize Irish political leaders. In all of these illustrations the hysterical masses escape the control of their maker and threaten the country with violence and anarchy.<sup>80</sup>

The aforementioned British cartoonists formed some of the most renowned illustrators of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In their drawings they all relied heavily on physiognomy through the increasing use of prognathism in the representation of Irish rebels. They laid the groundwork for the simianization of the Irish that became popular in other parts of the world, as their style greatly influenced

<sup>80</sup> Forker, 63; M. De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy*, 249.



recklessness, and political volatility were inherently Irish and therefore they could never be part of the Anglo-Saxon race. Moreover, the fact that many Irishmen were Catholic, a fundamentally destructive and superstitious religion to the English, confirmed the Victorian belief that the Irish Celts were exactly the opposite of Anglo-Saxons. Consequently, these convictions, reinforced by sciences like social Darwinism and physiognomy, were reflected in the art of caricature. Science proved to the British that the Irish were in fact inherently inferior and to underscore this, English caricaturists provided the Irish with simian features or just turned them directly into apes. Before, the British had oppressed the Irish through physical and economical force, and now through visual metaphor as well.

As a result of the English colonization of the United States, the simianization of the Irish quickly gained popularity amongst Americans as well. This is not strange, as the attribution of ape-like features to the Irish was already acquiring influence during the late eighteenth century, while Great Britain was fighting the rebels in the American Revolution to keep possession of its colony. It is very likely that this tradition within caricature flew across the Atlantic during this period and well after, when Anglo-Saxons kept forming the majority of immigrants arriving in the United States. It is therefore interesting to compare the English and the American style of caricature, with regard to the depiction of the Irish.

## Chapter 4 Early American cartoons

Throughout the nineteenth century, British audiences were offered increasingly simian images of the Irish. The representation of particular groups through physiognomy meant that external features had a connection to character, which essentially meant that one could recognize a criminal by the size of his nose. Victorian England already possessed a highly visual culture, therefore many English were quickly able to interpret cues in caricatures and other visual media. Physiognomic messages from images that represented Irishness provided British audiences with information about the Irish character, resulting in the popular notion that simianized features were unmistakably linked to the Irish identity.<sup>81</sup> The United States, however, was a different case. Nineteenth-century America had not yet developed a sturdy iconography in cartoons, and therefore needed to find methods based on their own beliefs and traditions. As a result of this, American cartoons developed other styles and topics than English cartoons. This chapter will study early American cartoons in order to understand how the process of creating a visual language in the United States worked, and how this resulted in the creation of an Irish stereotype.

American cartoons differed greatly from English cartoons. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the British had been familiar with a wide array of political advertisements and illustrations. Americans, on the other hand, lacked a similar access to images, resulting in a visually uneducated audience. Before the 1850s, when the concept of the American illustrated magazine had not yet been developed, illustrations tended to be expensive and reached only a small group of educated individuals. However, during the nineteenth century literacy levels started to drop as a consequence of the enormous expansion of the American population through immigration. Because less people were able to read verbal cues, a visual language was needed, a development of racial and ethnic types that could be recognized by all. Though, it was only by the second half of the nineteenth century that American cartoonists succeeded to establish visual cues for the recognition of the Irish character. By this time, however, British audiences had already been thoroughly exposed to a consistent, recognizable Irish image. For example, the stovepipe hat was frequently employed as a means to describe an Irishman, both in imagery as well as in other cultural outings, like the theatre. Whereas the hat served as a symbol for the backwardness of the Irish, the Irishman with simianized features demonstrated a growing concern about evolution and an obsession with ethnology and classification.<sup>82</sup>

Contrary to the British, Americans were more interested in depicting aspects of social hierarchy, and less in the physiognomic aspects of identification. Especially northerners seemed to be more concerned with differentiating groups by class than through racial and ethnic features, as classifications of race did not produce enough useful information about one's social and economic

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<sup>81</sup> Pearl, 180-181.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

status, something that was considered quite important – especially before the Civil War. Thus until the 1860s, American representations of the Irish did not touch upon the topic of race as it was considered less important than social status and political preferences. This in contrast to African Americans, who were positioned at the bottom of the social ladder, were more firmly scientifically categorized than the Irish, and were therefore frequently portrayed with stereotypical physiognomic cues. Because the position of the Irish in society was not yet fully framed, they did not have a fixed set of stereotypical features that could be shown in caricatures.<sup>83</sup>

In Britain, the position of the Irish was firmly situated at the bottom of society. Consequently, British caricaturists tended to portray Irish activists as an easily recognizable, monstrous foe with bestial, simianized features. This in contrast to the United States, where Irish immigrants were less frequently defined as violent and mindless apes because of their diversity and their capability of being part of different social classes, thus remaining visually distinct. This difference in representation of the Irish between Britain and the United States thus demonstrates the importance of context to the creation of visual representation.<sup>84</sup>

### **Symbols in American cartoons**

The Irish that arrived in mid-nineteenth-century America as a result of famine emigration found themselves in a radically changing environment. The United States stood on the brink of a civil war between North and South, and growing racial and political tensions created a confusing setting for the Irish: they were both welcomed and rejected, ridiculed and praised. Furthermore, these immigrants arrived in a nation that had maintained a long tradition of discrimination against Catholics, which made them suspect from the first moment they set foot ashore. However, despite the persistent prejudices the Irish encountered in America, other than in Britain, they did not occupy the lowest position in society and had access to social mobility and political power. Especially the latter was an opportunity the Irish gladly seized, using their legal and political freedom to establish the first and most powerful political voting bloc the United States had even known.<sup>85</sup>

During and after the 1840s, whole Irish families were forced to emigrate as a result of the Famine. Once arrived in the United States, the immigrants found lots of job opportunities to build up a new life. This changed, however, after the 1860s, when economic recession set in after the drying of the Gold Rush and the complete destruction of the Southern economy after the abolition of slavery. The ever-increasing group of Irish immigrants now formed a threat to American jobs and resources, as can be extracted from the representation of Paddy in illustrations as a simianized, barbaric creature.

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<sup>83</sup> Curtis, 13-15; Pearl, 184.

<sup>84</sup> Pearl, 182.

<sup>85</sup> Wittke, 23; Gabaccia, 73; Pearl, 184.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the emphasis on the Irish as an outsider became even more evident.<sup>86</sup>

For many years, Irish immigrants had formed a topic of interest and friction on both England and the United States. However, the group of Irish that arrived before the Famine provided a very different set of characteristics for caricaturists to sketch than those arriving after the Famine. Because printed images were not yet widely distributed before the 1850s, and the availability of verbal cues was minimal, caricaturists relied partly on a set of traditions that had been established in Britain. The Irish did find new opportunities in the United States, but this did not mean they were completely free of the discrimination they had encountered in England. American caricaturists were very much aware of the British tradition of simianization in cartoons, but did not fully adopt it. Neither did they completely reject it, however. The United States represented a new life in the eyes of many immigrants, but in fact was never an entirely new place. Inevitably, the Irish ape crossed the Atlantic as many immigrants before him, although it changed as a result of its new surroundings.<sup>87</sup>

Upwardly mobile Irish were portrayed differently than those deriving from the lower classes. In contrast to British artists, who constructed a unitary Irish physiognomy with a series of recognizable visual cues, American caricaturists rather distinguished the Irish as different groups. In spite of their poverty, lack of education, and their 'problematic' religion, the Irish were able to develop considerable power as a result of their strong political organization. In fact, it was recognized by several politicians that they were a force to be reckoned with, as the Irish occupied a variety of niches in society. Thus, unlike the uniformly racialized depictions of African Americans, the Irish were not considered as one homogeneous group, and consequently, were not depicted as such.<sup>88</sup>

Because illustrations of the Irish before the 1840s did not contain specific features with regard to their position in society, American caricaturists instead relied on language to communicate their standpoint. Political setting also formed an important contextual theme in cartoons throughout the century, which provides an indication of the growing importance of the Irish as a result of their increasing political organization. These notions become apparent in the cartoon 'A Democratic Voter',

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<sup>86</sup> M. Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West* (Helena 2005), 42-43; Pearl, 185; Anbinder, 109; Wittke, 117; Jackson, 1005.

<sup>87</sup> Pearl, 188-189.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, 177.

which portrays the battle between the Tammany Hall and radical Democratic factions for Irish votes in the 1836 New York elections (*figure 11*). The cartoon is a good example of an early American image that lacked a visual language as to identify Irishness and therefore had to rely on words. In doing so, ethnicity is not emphasized by the exaggeration of facial features or particular clothing, but through the rendering of an accent. For example, the Irish-American voter states in the cartoon, “As I’m a hindependent Helector, I means to give my vote according to conscience and him as Tips most!” In this sentence, the pronounced ‘h’ sound in front of words beginning with vowels was a clear sign of Irish speech, and thus a strong reference to identification. The use of ungrammatical language demonstrates the immigrant’s lack of education, whereas his statement on the subject of ‘voting according to conscience’ is meant as irony: during the nineteenth century, Irish Americans were notorious for their bribing of votes. Moreover, with this sentence, the caricaturist points to the notion of the Irishman being unable to vote on his own, because of his allegiances to Rome

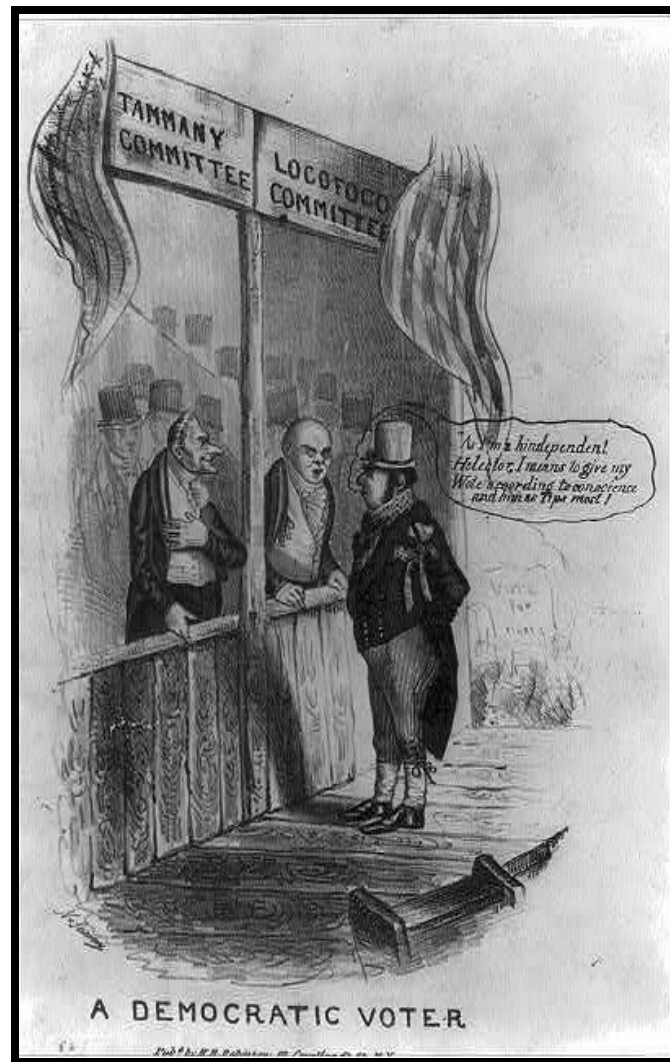


Figure 11. Napoleon Sarony, ‘A Democratic Voter.’ 1836. Source: *The Library of Congress*.

and his inability to think for himself. The use of irony is also applied to the term ‘hindependent Helector’, which must be considered a jab at the formation of Irish voting blocs that supposedly stripped the Irish of the displayed independence of the portrayed figure.<sup>89</sup>

After the 1840s, American caricaturists started to develop recognizable visual cues for Irishness, and in doing so, sometimes turned to local geography. This can be seen, for example, in the cartoon ‘War! Or No War’, in which two Irish immigrants discuss the dispute between the United States and Great Britain over the northern boundary of Oregon (*figure 12*). Opinion was sharply divided between support for a compromise claim of territory as far north as the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, and those

<sup>89</sup> Library of Congress, ‘A Democratic Voter’, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/app/item/2008661292/>; Pearl, 175-177; S. P. Erie, ‘Politics, the Public Sector and Irish Social Mobility: San Francisco, 1870-1900’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 31:2 (1978), 38.

who went for the more expansive 4.40 boundary. One can identify the two illustrated figures as Irish through the way they are dressed, see for instance their stovepipe hats – a classic characteristic of Irishness, as we have established before. Moreover, the two men are standing in front of the Bowery Theatre, a popular spot in the Bowery section of New York among working-class Irish immigrants. Their upper bodies are disproportionately large, an indication to the typical Irish occupation as physical laborers. Their chins are also quite interestingly sized, possibly to imply these men are from a

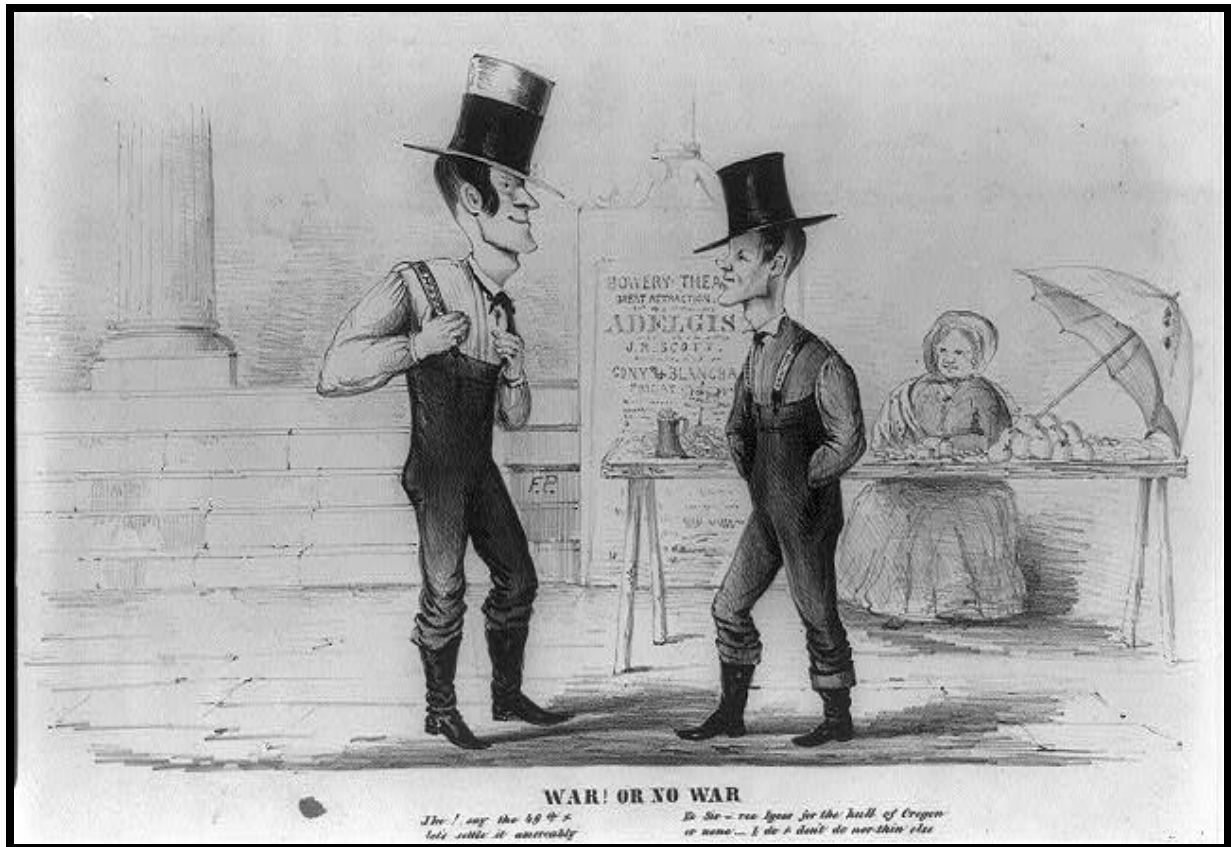


Figure 12. Frances Palmer, 'War! Or no War.' April 25, 1846. Source: *The Library of Congress*.

lower order of development, although these cues were not yet officially framed as representative for Irishness. Thus, to make sure his message comes across, the caricaturist applies language to underscore the backwardness of the illustrated Irishmen. The man on the left says, "Ike! Say the 49<sup>th</sup> & let's settle it amercably." The other responds, "No Sir-ree I goes for the hull or Oregon or none – I do & don't do nor-thin else."<sup>90</sup> The addition of the 'r' in the words 'amicably' and 'nothing' demonstrates lack of 'proper' English pronunciation, and at the same time refers to the stereotypical Irish accent as seen by Americans.

As a consequence of political and economic changes in America after the Civil War, the Irish suddenly had to compete with African Americans for jobs. Because both groups were now placed on the same level within society, they were portrayed in a similar way in American visual media. Despite the fact that many Irishmen were pro-slavery, the group was not only identified with class-neutral

<sup>90</sup> Library of Congress, 'War! Or no War', <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/app/item/2008661463/>; Pearl, 179.

symbols like the shillelagh pipe and the shamrock, but also by their brutish, simian behavior that on both sides of the Atlantic had long been connected to the character of blacks. And so the Irish eventually became depicted as white, lower-class apes in the New World.<sup>91</sup>

## **Conclusion**

American cartoons developed other styles and topics than English cartoons as a result of underdeveloped iconography. Before the publishing of the first American illustrated magazine, illustrations were expensive, and reached only small, educated audiences. However, with the increasing numbers of illiterate immigrants arriving in the United States, a visual language was needed, and by the second half of the nineteenth century American caricaturists had succeeded in creating one. Contrary to the English, Americans seemed less engaged in the physiognomic aspects of identification. Instead, they were more interested in depicting aspects of social hierarchy and politics as class distinctions allowed for more ambiguity than the binary classifications of race. As a result of this, Irish immigrants were less frequently depicted as violent and mindless simians in early American caricature. This changed, however, in the mid-nineteenth century, when interest in physiognomic aspects of races began to increase. Before the 1850s, American caricaturists lay more emphasis on language and geography to make the audience aware of the specific group that was portrayed. In contrast, after the 1850s, emphasis shifted towards facial features, and as a result of that development, the simian Paddy crossed the Atlantic.

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<sup>91</sup> Pearl, 189.

## Chapter 5 Thomas Nast and the Irish

Before the 1850s, America's interest in physiognomy was minimal. Cartoonists preferred political and economic hierarchies over race, and often laid emphasis on characteristics of language and geography, rather than facial features. This changed, however, during the mid-nineteenth century, when literacy levels started to drop and caricaturists needed new methods to bring their message across. Interest in physiognomy increased and the simian Paddy appeared more frequent in cartoons. The most influential American cartoonist to turn the Irish into apes was Thomas Nast. Considering his personal background, this notion is quite interesting. Where did his extreme distaste from the Irish come from and why can this be considered paradoxical? Moreover, in what way did Nast apply the science of physiognomy in his cartoons of the Irish? What does that say about the status of a visual language in the United States? And what does his portrayal of African Americans say about his view of the Irish?

Thomas Nast was born in Landau in der Pfalz on September 27, 1840. A Bavarian town near Alsace, Landau can be considered a reflection of a confused history of Franco-German influences. The French first captured the town during the Thirty Year's War, and again during the reign of Louis XIV. During the next century, the French lost and regained the town several times until they secured their position and remained for over a hundred years. Napoleon had built bastions in Landau, but after his defeat in 1815 these were turned into Bavarian outposts after the Congress of Vienna restored the city to the German Confederacy.<sup>92</sup>

Because the town's dual heritage, Landau's inhabitants also had diverging political sympathies. Nast's family was generally sympathetic to the French, combining French revolutionary ideals with those of the German liberal movement. It is not clear why the family in the end decided to immigrate to the United States, as Joseph Nast's accounts of political activities are vague. He could have found conditions sufficiently intolerable to remain in Landau, or, as was the case for many of his countrymen, he was drawn to America by the temptations of social freedom and economic opportunity. Either way, in 1847 the Nast family all arrived in New York.<sup>93</sup>

In the United States, Thomas attended both public and Catholic schools. After excelling at neither, he decided to pursue his passion for drawing, and against his parent's advice he enrolled in an art school run by Theodore Kaufmann. A racial immigrant from Germany, Kaufmann had studied with several influential artists, and established a reputation as a painter of obscure philosophical ideas. According to art historian Albert Boime, Kaufmann's influence on his student is often dismissed, however, it may explain Nast's ambition to paint monumental pictorial cycles and to work mainly with symbolism.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, Nast's German roots shine through in his work. Influenced by the German

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<sup>92</sup> A. Boime, 'Thomas Nast and French Art', *American Art Journal*, 4:1 (Spring 1972), 44; Justice, 174.

<sup>93</sup> A. Bigelow Paine, *Th. Nast: His Period and His Pictures* (Princeton 1904), 7; Boime, 'Thomas Nast', 44; Keller, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Boime, 'Thomas Nast and French Art', 45.



tradition of narrative folklore, Nast created the classic American Coca-Cola Santa Claus: a typical embodiment of the 'Biedermeier *Gemutlichkeit*.' However, Nast was also a product of revolutionary ideas, having grown up in the years before the 1848 revolution he was repeatedly exposed to the nationalism, secularism, and the belief in progress that formed the major elements of mid-nineteenth-century German liberalism.<sup>95</sup>

The beginning of Nast's artistic career coincided with that of American illustrated journalism. When he was fifteen he took a job as a paid artist at the upcoming magazine *Leslie's Illustrated*. Thus from a very young age, Nast was exposed to a mass-circulation journalism that shaped his work significantly. Between 1858 and 1862 Nast worked as a freelancer for *Leslie's*, *Harper's Weekly*, and the *New York Illustrated News*, where he schooled himself in pictorial journalism.<sup>96</sup>

Historian Morton Keller points out that the conditions of illustrated weekly journalism affected Nast's artistic technique as much as it did the content of his work. He portrayed urban life, covered events of popular interest and drew his findings using a brush and ink wash technique for tonal renderings. Nast's first important drawings commented on the Civil War and relied on a technique with somber, fluid tones of gray and black. This changed after the war, when his work shifted to heavy political criticism, and became significant because of its sharpness and the use of clear lines. Nast's more mature style was characterized by his mastery of the 'cross-hatch'-technique, in which he drew onto a block of wood using a pencil. The scratched lines in the wood served to guide the engraver in the process of printing, a method based on the work of the English caricaturist John Tenniel. However, the power of Nast's art lies more in his message than in his method.<sup>97</sup>

Nast's work is characterized by a striking and persistent hostility. Hostility towards Catholics, and to Irish Americans in particular. With regard to his personal background and his well-known sympathies for minorities, this seems quite paradoxical. The explanation of this sentiment can partially be found in Nast's loyalty to the Radical Republican Party.

The Radical Republicans were a liberal, progressive, nationalistic, and, most importantly, a Protestant organization. The distribution of Protestant images had formed the foundation of the Union's victory and struggle against slavery during the Civil War. Consequently, Americans came to see Radical Republicanism and Protestantism as inseparable. This assumption was reflected in 1868 when American author and social critic Charles Eliot Norton ventured the view that Protestantism "might become the complete expression, and afford the most effective organization of the moral order which underlies the political system." Similarly, aside from the slaveholding, secessionist Democracy, Roman Catholicism was regarded as the number one threat to the Republic.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Justice, 174.

<sup>96</sup> Keller, 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Bigelow Paine, *Th. Nast*, 135-136; Keller, 8-9.

<sup>98</sup> Keller, 159.

The roots of Nast's anti-Catholicism is somewhat under discussion. His close friend and biographer Albert Bigelow Paine suggested it was a result of an experience of his youth in Germany. There were both Protestants and Catholics in Landau, and once Nast saw two little girls being pushed out of a Catholic Church rather roughly for repeating some Protestant prayers. According to Paine this incident disturbed Nast deeply and he "resented the treatment of these little girls." Moreover, Paine believes "it may have marked the beginnings of a bitterness which long after was so mature in those relentless attacks upon bigotry which won for him the detestation, if not the fear, of pope and priest."<sup>99</sup> Others suggest that Nast's anti-Catholicism had roots in his German Protestant upbringing and his intellectual coming of age at a time when anticlerical liberalism was strong. Papal policy and domestic events in the postwar years may have intensified his hostility to the Church.<sup>100</sup> However, it is also suggested that accounts of Nast's religious upbringing do not definitively label him either Catholic or Protestant, but could well have been caused by the former as he was baptized at the Sankt Maria Catholic Church in Landau and for a time received Catholic education in New York City. The exact moment of his conversion to Protestantism remains unclear, although was likely formalized upon his marriage in 1861 as the Nast family attended services at the St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Morristown, New Jersey. Whether or not Nast was born a Catholic, as an adult he certainly was not.<sup>101</sup>

During the 1860s, Nast's cartoons mostly dealt with the political and domestic issues of Reconstruction. Along with *Harper's Weekly*, Nast liked to warn for Confederates and Democratic anti-Civil War Unionists, who seemed to threaten his cherished Republicanism. However, towards the end of the decade, Nast's interests slowly shifted towards threats from the pope and aggressive Irish-Catholic gangs. The combination of the pope's declaration of infallibility and the unjustifiable brutality by Irish Catholics convinced Nast of conspiracy and treachery by the Democratic Party. In Europe, radical nationalistic movements started to make their presence felt, and Nast's antipapal drawings accompanied *Harper's* reports of these events. The situation worsened when in December 1864 pope Pius IX promulgated a syllabus of 'the principal errors of our time', in which he insisted on the primacy of the Church in matters of culture, science, and education; rejected the principle of liberty of conscience and worship; and constituted the dogma of Papal Infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The Council thereby confirmed the judgment of Protestant critics that the Church indeed was an institution hostile to liberal nationalism that had many followers in Western Europe and the United States.<sup>102</sup>

Many countries responded adversely to the position of the Church, but Republican spokesmen in the United States stood at the forefront when it came to judging the pope. *Harper's Weekly* reacted displeased to Pius' proclamation and stated: "In the breaking of chains, in the increase of knowledge,

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<sup>99</sup> Paine, 6.

<sup>100</sup> Keller, 160.

<sup>101</sup> Justice, 175-176.

<sup>102</sup> Keller, 160; Justice, 174-175.

in the higher welfare of the greater number of human beings, in the removal of abuses, in the extinction of superstition, in the emancipation of civilization from the mortmain of ecclesiasticism, the Pope sees only the ravages of Satan.” After this statement, the magazine carried on publishing many articles on the evils of Roman Catholicism in Europe, but especially at home.<sup>103</sup>

Nast fully shared these anti-Catholic sentiments. In fact, he believed that the Church posed an enormous challenge to his carefully cherished social beliefs. In particular he feared that the pope saw the United States as a new region to conquer and convert. However, one must keep in mind that the negative views of the Catholic Church in Nast’s cartoons echoed the popular nativist beliefs from the Know-Nothing Party, so Nast’s position was not unique. When he and his family left Germany in the 1840s, the debate between the Catholic Church and its followers on the one hand, and liberal reformers and radical revolutionaries on the other, was already heated. In the United States, the discussion was fueled by the excessively growing number of Catholic immigrants and the fierce response of the nativists. Moreover, the extremely ultramontane attitude of the American Catholic Church in, for example, the rejection of American democratic traditions, tended to isolate Catholics even more. In this context, historian Benjamin Justice argues, Nast’s anti-Romanist work cannot be considered exemplary of anti-Catholicism in general.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, Justice asserts that Nast’s negative opinion with regard to ‘political Romanism’ actually complicates modern interpretations of his art as merely ‘anti-Catholic.’ His cartoons criticized the Catholic Church’s interference into public policy, but his drawings also sharply criticized other American elements, even his fellow Republicans. They actually remained quite consistent in tone with his other illustrations, as well as images by other cartoonists in magazines as *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Punch*. Furthermore, with regard to their message, Nast’s criticism of Catholics was not essentially meant as anti-Catholic, but mostly political and anticlerical. Yet, on the other hand, Nast’s cartoons often lacked a clear distinction between ‘political Romanism’ and Catholicism as a religious belief and practice, especially with regard to the belief that the Catholic laity could not think for themselves, which is often shown in Nast’s stereotyped depictions of the Irish.<sup>105</sup>

Nast was concerned about the increasing number of Irish Catholics in the United States. The fact that the Irish seemed to be more loyal to the pope than to the United States, annoyed him. Moreover, Irish Americans as a group often had a special fondness for those aspects of American public life that he, as a fervent Republican, most despised: slavery and the Democratic Party. Nast’s negative opinion of the Irish is quite interesting, as one would assume from an immigrant as himself, a German nonetheless – a group that formed one of the main targets of nativist activities next to the Irish – and a fierce Republican with sympathies for minorities like the Chinese, Indians, and African

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<sup>103</sup> Keller, 160.

<sup>104</sup> Justice, 175.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, 176.

Americans, that he would feel contempt towards the Irish Catholics and even bond with them as a result of that.

It is suggested that Nast's emphasis on the brutishness of the Irish may have originated from his experiences with violence and bullying in his youth. Moreover, in the neighborhood in New York City where he grew up, acts of violence by the Irish against African Americans were not uncommon, so he might have developed a contempt for the Irish as a result of that.<sup>106</sup> However, according to Curtis, it seems more likely that his extremely critical cartoons of Irish Americans derived from his wish to eradicate corruption, bossism, and racial as well as religious (that is to say, Irish Catholic) bigotry from American society. As aforementioned, Nast was a product of European dissent during the 1840s in more than one respect. In the United States he became a radical Republican and moderate Protestant who abhorred the immorality of the Tweed Ring and Tammany Hall, and ridiculed the white supremacists of post-Civil War America. Nast believed no redemption would come from those Irish-American politicians who formed a powerful bloc in the Democratic Party, who were discriminatory of African Americans and insisted on parochial schooling at public costs. When Nast drew an Irish American, he always created a monstrous creature or a heavily prognathous man.<sup>107</sup>

With regard to the Know-Nothing attacks on both German and Irish immigrants, one might assume that the two groups would unite against a common enemy. Although this was true in several cases, the Germans and Irish in general did not like each other. Wittke points out that Irish Catholic priests and newspapers despised German radicals and 'heathens' as much as they did the nativists. German refugees of the 1848 revolution were seen by the Irish as "atheists, slanderers of the Sabbath, 'red' republicans, or socialists, whereas the Irish often sympathized with the Know Nothings who opposed such 'foreign anarchists' and 'enemies of law and order.'" One newspaper even suggested immigration restrictions to keep such undesirables out of the country. The Germans, on the other hand, had an equally low opinion of their Irish opponents. A radical German editor described them as "the 'praetorian guard of brutal terrorism' and justified the desire of the Know Nothings to save America from Catholicism, although he condemned the methods they used." Another German editor, referred to the Irish as "our national enemies, not because they are Irishmen, but because they are the truest guards of the papacy." Some German revolutionaries even surpassed the Know Nothings in their anticlericalism and in their attacks on the Catholic Church.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> F.D. Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill 2013), 34.

<sup>107</sup> Curtis, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Wittke, 120-121; M.R. Casey, 'The Limits of Equality: Racial and Ethnic Tensions in the New Republic, 1789-1836', in: R.H. Bayor, *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History* (New York 2003), 70.

Nast's personal aversion of Irish Catholics grew from the 1863 draft riot, when desperate, mostly Irish-Catholic mobs roamed the streets of New York City, attacking several targets associated with the draft, including African Americans by burning down the Colored Orphan Asylum. However, the cartoon Nast drew of this incident does not show much simian-like features on the rebel's faces, as one would expect. This might have been the result of a report in *Harper's Weekly* that cautioned their readers not to blame the Irish exclusively for the riots. Although the magazine acknowledged some



Figure 13. Thomas Nast, 'Draft Riot.' August 1, 1863. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Irish involvement, they strongly emphasized that other groups also contributed to the disturbance, and even offered examples of Irish policemen who put their lives at risk to stop the violence.<sup>109</sup> One can find, however, some hints of Irish participation in the 1863 riot in Nast's drawing. For example the two men on the left – one man with a brick and one wearing a checkered blouse and a vest – are attributed with slightly simious features. The same can be said for the man sitting on the ground in the middle of the picture. He gets beaten by a policeman with a fair Anglo-Saxon complexion, and the Irishman's face seems very much the opposite of fair. Also the man behind the aforementioned man with the checkered blouse might be seen as a portrayal of an Irishman as a result of his small, but still recognizable stovepipe hat, sloping forehead, projecting mouth and extended lower jaw (*figure 13*). Thus, while there are some suggestions of the Irish partaking in the violence, Nast does not explicitly point them out but leaves it to the viewer's imagination to understand his underlying message.

Nast's sympathetic, suggestive image of the Irishman was quite unusual. In most of his cartoons, Nast placed great emphasis on ridiculing Irish violence and politics. His disgust of the Irish grew, for example, after experiences with subsequent riots on Saint Patricks' Day in 1867 between

<sup>109</sup> Justice, 176; Halloran, *Thomas Nast*, 77; M. Walfred, 'New York Draft Riots of 1863' (2014), <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/new-york-draft-riots-of-1863/>.

Irish celebrants and a Metropolitan Police Force controlled by the Republican legislature, and Orange Day in 1871, when the Ulster Protestant members of the Orange Society held an initially forbidden parade to celebrate their national holiday under the protection of regiments of the National Guard and were attacked by large numbers of Irish Catholics. The Guardsmen opened fire, killing over thirty people.<sup>110</sup>



Figure 14. Thomas Nast, 'St. Patrick's Day 1867 -- The Day we Celebrate.' April 6, 1867. Source: Wikigallery.

After these events, Nast was not so kind in his depictions of the Irish. He ruthlessly epitomized them in the shape of a terrifying simianized monster (*figure 14*). For example, the features of the man in the forefront with the spear in his right hand and a sash with Irish symbols draped around his left shoulder are hardly just suggestions of a lower hierarchy. The man is turned completely into an ape-like fiend, including sharp fang-like teeth. With this image, Nast does not leave anything to the imagination. Every rioter is a brutish Irishman, and Nast has no intention of showing mercy to them on this matter.

Nast's monstrous, simian drawings of Irishmen were influenced by contemporary English publications like *Punch*, *Judy*, and *Fun*. The cartoons in these magazines were based on popular concepts of physiognomy that suggested an angular face represented a lower stage of evolutionary development. Although English cartoons used several different images of the Irish, depictions of the

<sup>110</sup> J. Chal Vinson, *Thomas Nast: Political Cartoonists* (Georgia 1967), 18-19; Justice, 176 and 178; Walfred, 'Something that will not blow over' (2014), <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/something-that-will-not-blow-over-29-july-1971/>

simian Irishman gained more popularity when Fenianism increased during the 1860s. These images did not only suggest an inherent Irish tendency for violence and crime, but also placed great emphasis on them being unfit for self-government. It has been pointed out that the Irish ape served as an implicit political construction. It was seen as a statement of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, as well as an argument for English authority and colonialism in Ireland. In the United States, Nast used these images in a similar way through the portrayal of the Irish as uncontrollable and ungovernable. In doing so, they seemed to threaten Nast's favorite topic of the 'republic under siege', for example by their active support of the Democratic Party.<sup>111</sup>

### **Catholicism and politics**

The Catholic Church and the Democratic political machine of Tammany Hall formed Nast's favorite objects for ridicule. Throughout the early 1870s, both Nast and *Harper's Weekly* used the church and the public school issue as part of larger campaigns against the Church and Tammany. However, Nast and *Harper's* argued that the essence of their campaign was not anti-Catholic, but mainly 'anti-despot', and particularly based on the pope's rejection of republicanism and religious freedom. Both were not targeting the cultural or symbolic aspects of Catholicism, but only the pope's ultramontane attitude towards politics and the state, an argument that also reflected popular American and European notions that the papal policies were antidemocratic.<sup>112</sup>

*Harper's* critical attacks on Tammany Hall and the government of New York City, however, could not go unpunished. City officials were not amused when they heard the active advocacy of their demise by the publishing house. As a result, all *Harper's* books were pulled from public schools and replaced by those of a rival company, which of course was owned by members of the Tweed ring. Nast and *Harper's Weekly* were outraged, and planned their retribution. In September 1871, journalist Eugene Lawrence, *Harper's* expert on Catholicism and education, published a destructive article entitled 'The Priests and the Children' in which he accused the new school board of being part of a conspiracy of Irish Catholics and Jesuits, who were slowly destroying the American public schools through weakening attendance. The article was accompanied by Nast's most famous educational cartoon and the only one to be reissued by *Harper's Weekly*. 'The American River Ganges' combined a number of elements in the artist's anti-Catholic Church and anti-Tweed cartoons. The drawing is often used as evidence for the public schooling issue between Catholics and Protestants, as well as evidence for widespread anti-Catholic criticism in the United States. However, according to Benjamin Justice, Nast's message seems more complex, as the most important reason for him to attack the New York City Board of Public Instruction might have been revenge for banning the textbooks.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Curtis, 13-15; Justice, 177.

<sup>112</sup> Justice, 183.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, 186-187.

‘The American River Ganges’ portrays Boss Tweed overseeing mitered bishops, horizontal like crocodiles, attacking American schoolchildren – white, black, American Indian, and Chinese (figure 15). The schoolhouse, bombarded like Fort Sumter, appears in the background, as well as the Saint Peter’s Basilica flying Irish and papal flags. Like the article, the cartoon accused the New York City School Board of being part of a Romanist and Democratic Party conspiracy, both parties being

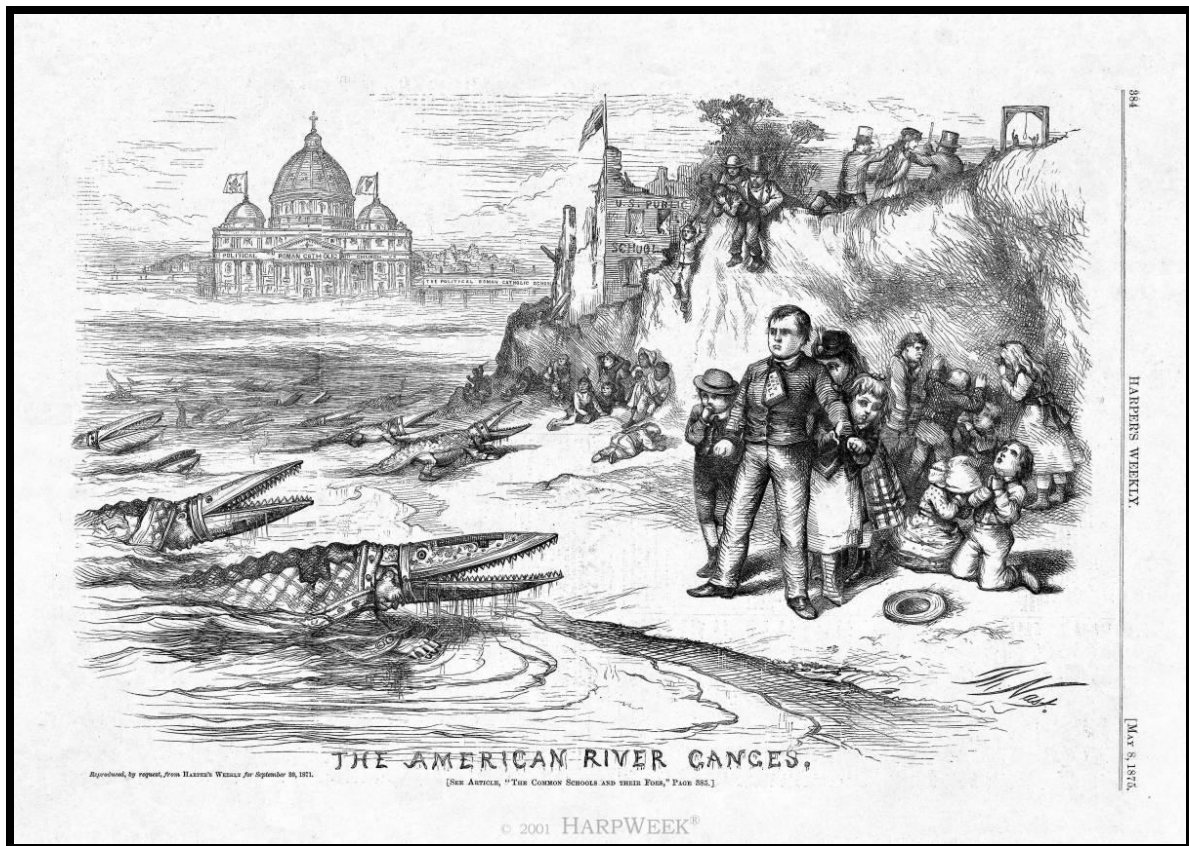


Figure 15. Thomas Nast, ‘The American River Ganges.’ September 30, 1871. Source: *Harper’s Weekly*.

depicted as planning to kill the children and their teachers. Those who escape the crocodiles will hang from the gallows shown in the distance.<sup>114</sup>

Interestingly, while Nast refers to the Irish Tammany Hall and the Tweed Ring in his cartoon, he does not turn any of them into simianized creatures. Not obviously at least. One could see a reference to the ape-like Irishman in the figure on the far right, standing on top of the wall next to the gallows, holding a club in his right hand and wearing a stovepipe hat. As we have established before, these were considered the stereotypes of the classic Irishman. However, because his features are not clearly visible, Nast does not actually simianize the figure in his cartoon. But at the same time, he does turn the clerics into dangerous monsters by drawing them as attacking crocodiles, which can be interpreted as an indirect blow at the increasing group of Irish Americans. It might not be a

<sup>114</sup> R.C. Kennedy, ‘The American River Ganges’, *Harper’s Weekly* (September 30, 1871), <http://www.harperweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=May&Date=8;Justice,187-190;Paine,190>.



coincidence that Nast decided to turn the priests into water creatures, as the Catholic Irish immigrants also arrived ‘from’ the water of the Atlantic as a threatening group of invaders.

Nast’s inspiration for transforming the miters of the Catholic bishops into the jaws of crocodiles derived from a small cartoon by John Leech published in the English magazine *Punch* (figure 16). Only Nast expanded the idea of the crocodile-priest into an invading group and added the collection of images that related to American public schools, politics, and the Catholic Church. Nast probably chose the Ganges River because he remembered an article in *Harper’s Weekly* from 1867 about the worship of crocodiles in India and because of the fact that the river is considered holy by Hindus. The cartoonist knew that his American audience would associate the Ganges with superstition, which was one of the notions about the Catholic Church he wanted to emphasize.<sup>115</sup>

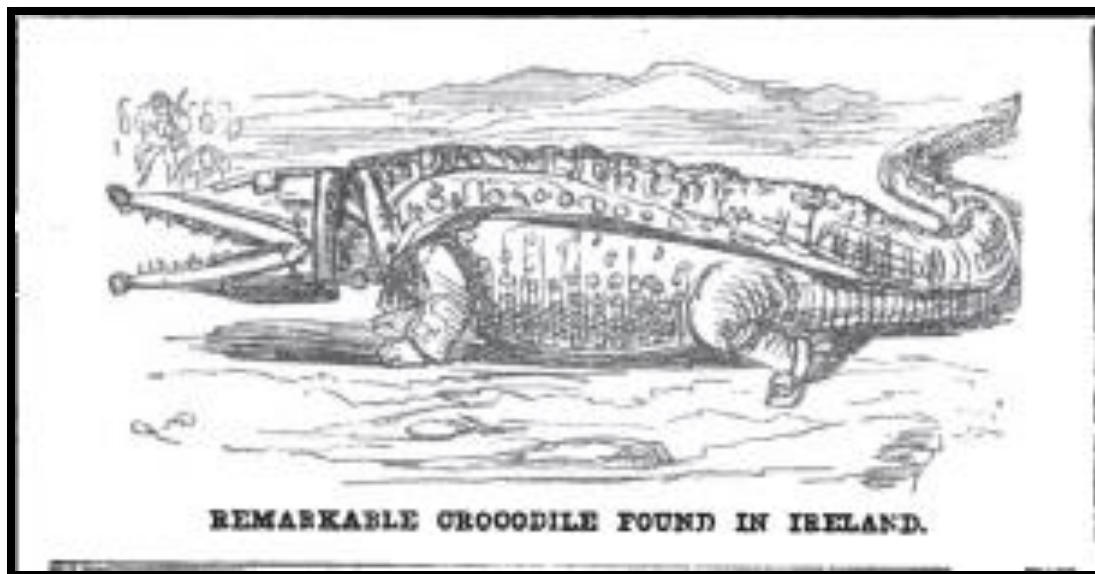


Figure 16. John Tenniel, ‘Remarkable Crocodile Found in Ireland.’ September 6, 1851. Source: *The Juvenile Instructor*.

Can this cartoon be perceived as evidence of widespread anti-Catholic criticism or of Protestant suspicions of Catholic attempts to reform? Not really. According to Benjamin Justice, the cartoon “is far better understood as Nast’s most radical use of the idea of a Romanist ‘threat’ to challenge Tweed and as better than a bitten thumb at the New York school board.” “The American River Ganges’ combined “the common critique that Catholic Church school policy was antidemocratic with Nast’s own campaign against the corrupt Tweed Ring.” Both Tammany and the Catholic Church opposed to republican government, which “rested, in the minds of many, on the central pillar of the free public school.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, this cartoon cannot be seen as a direct attack on the Catholic Church, but rather as firm criticism on the Church’s policies.

Another good example of Nast’s religious ethnocentrism is his cartoon ‘Religious Processions’, which was part of a series of drawings in a larger cartoon entitled ‘Something That Will

<sup>115</sup> Kennedy, ‘The American River Ganges.’

<sup>116</sup> Justice, 187 and 190.

Not ‘Blow Over’. The drawing is a depiction of the racial and ethnic tensions following the decade of the Civil War and how these tensions were complicated by New York City politics (*figure 17*). The Twelfth of July Orange parade commemorated the victory of the Protestant William of Orange, king of England, over Irish Catholics in the 1692 Battle of the Boyne in Ireland, and was celebrated annually by Irish Protestants. It was celebrated in New York for the first time in 1870. The Catholic Irish had rioted during the 1870 parade, and in 1871 they asked New York City officials to prohibit the Orange parade. The Orangemen were denied a permit because the parade would ‘threaten public safety’, which was ironic with regard to the riot of the year before.<sup>117</sup>

Nast’s cartoon demonstrates the importance of the Twelfth of July parades to the Orangemen and underscores the enormous sacrifice they would make if the parade was cancelled and if the



Figure 17. Thomas Nast, ‘Religious Processions.’ July 29, 1871. Source: *Harper’s Weekly*.

documentation in the other images of the cartoon. King William’s authorization is placed on a pedestal, while the Prince is trying to reason as one leader to another. He offers a compromise promising that the Protestants will abandon their parade if the Catholics will do the same. In doing so, he suggests, “Mr. St. Patrick, now I have been accorded to the same rights that you have I propose to give up my parades in the future. Will you do likewise?” Saint Patrick stubbornly replies, “NIVIR!” a clear and sordid reference to a heavy Irish brogue. With this cartoon, Nast creates an obstinate figure who will not listen to reason, very much in line with the popular notions about Irish Catholics during that period. Moreover, his attitude is anything but saintly: hands on his hips, exposing his vestments

Catholic Irish would stop marching on St. Patrick’s Day. The illustration depicts a stubborn Saint Patrick with simianized features standing next to William III, Prince of Orange, with two police escorts. The Prince shows the document that allows the parade for St. Patrick, the patron saint of Irish Catholics, to continue. The document is not offered humbly or secretly, or slipped across the floor as Tweed does with his

<sup>117</sup> M. Walfred, ‘Something That Will not “Blow Over” – 29 July 1871’, (2014) <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/something-that-will-not-blow-over-29-july-1971/>; Forker, 67.

and crucifix, disrespectfully turning away from William. And although he wears a priestly robe, he is depicted like an ape, emphasizing the stupid, stubborn and superstitious nature of Irish Catholics in general.<sup>118</sup>

Another cartoon excerpted from the series, entitled ‘The Unconditional Surrender’, also addresses the matter of the Orange parade (*figure 18*). It depicts a uniformed Irishman looking down to the men in front of him: the members of the once powerful Tammany Ring. Boss Tweed grovels on the ground, together with Sheriff Matthew Brennan, Peter Sweeny, Richard Connolly, John Thompson Hoffman, James Kelso and Abraham Oakey Hall.<sup>119</sup>

The uniformed man holding the saber and his companion raising the club are both provided with heavily simianized features. Without even knowing the context, the reader of the image immediately recognizes two Irishmen in these two figures. This is of course

confirmed when one recognizes the men groveling on the ground in front of the violent creatures. These men look servile and astonished, asking themselves what went wrong. With this, Nast points to the fact that Tammany Hall and the Tweed Ring are completely dependent from the Irish citizens of New York, and in doing so, he ridicules the immense power of the Irish in politics. They have the Tweed Ring in the palm of their hand, threatening with violence if they do not do what is asked of them. Again, this picture emphasizes the inherent brutishness that seems to characterize the Irish in every aspect of social life. The Latin cross on the uniformed Irishman’s hat confirms the religious position of the creature in this battle, but also refers to the direct link between the Irish, Tammany Hall, and the Catholic Church, underscoring the corrupt nature of these three groups. All is intertwined: ‘What are you going to do about it?’



Figure 18. Thomas Nast, ‘The Unconditional Surrender.’ July 29 1871. Source: *Harper’s Weekly*.

<sup>118</sup> Walfred, ‘Something That Will not “Blow Over” – 29 July 1871’, (2014) <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/something-that-will-not-blow-over-29-july-1871/>; Forker, 67.

<sup>119</sup> Keller, 104-105; Walfred, ‘Something That Will not “Blow Over”’, <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/something-that-will-not-blow-over-29-july-1871/>; R. Kennedy, ‘Something That Will Not “Blow Over”’, *Harper’s Weekly* (July 29, 1871), <http://www.harperweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=July&Date=29>

## Fenianism

The fact that Nast's cartoons are heavily influenced by English caricatures is shown in the cartoon entitled 'The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things' (figure 19). The drawing is based upon John Tenniel's 'The Fenian Guy Fawkes' from 1867. As Tenniel, Nast depicts a simianized Irishman sitting on top of

a barrel of gunpowder. The writing on the wall declares, "Everything obnoxious to us shall be abolished, Our liberty has been taken away (killing Orangemen), We must rule." The caption on the barrel reads, "Uncle Sam's Gun Powder." With this cartoon, Nast points out the hypocrisy of the Catholic Irish protesting the Protestant Irish parade in New York City.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Nast provides the man on the barrel with simian features, letting his audience know this must be an Irishman. In doing so, he also points to the typically Irish stupidity and their position on the evolutionary ladder. This notion is underscored by the striped breeches, small version of the stovepipe hat, and the rum bottle: the typical stereotype of the drunken Irishman. The police baton under his arm and the burning torch in his left hand, not to mention the gun powder barrel, emphasizes the inherently violent nature of the Irish, and especially the nature of the Fenian Irishman.

Although famous, the image is usually shown without the text below. It is therefore rarely considered in the context of the Orangemen's riots that made Nast decide to reuse Tenniel's cartoon. However, the text accompanying the cartoon can be considered quite important:

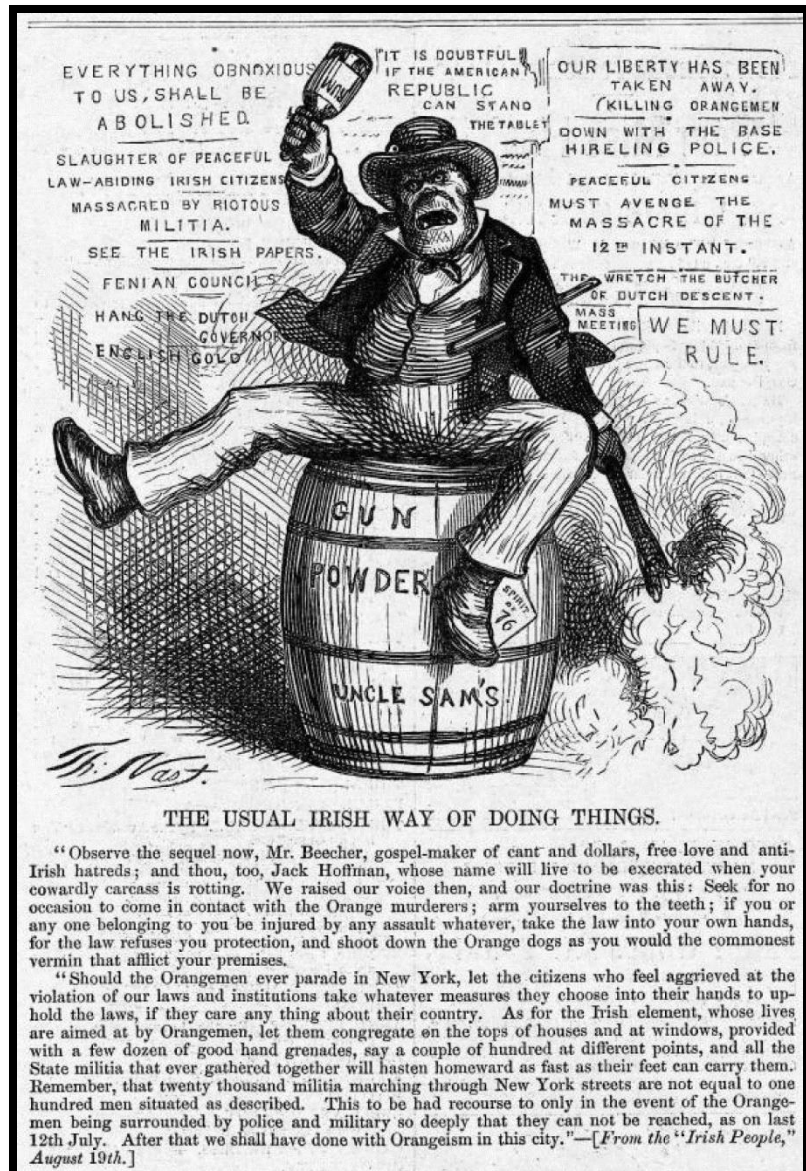


Figure 19. Thomas Nast, 'The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things.' September 2, 1871. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>120</sup> Forker, 63-64; R. Walfred, 'Irish Stereotype,' (2014), <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/irish-stereotype/>

“Observe the sequel now, Mr. Beecher, gospel-maker of cant and dollars, free love and anti-Irish hatreds; and thou, too, Jack Hoffman, whose name will live to be execrated when your cowardly carcass is rotting. We raised our voice then, and our doctrine was this: Seek for no occasion to come in contact with the Orange murderers; arm yourselves to the teeth; if you or any one belonging to you be injured by any assault whatever, take the law into our own hands, for the law refuses you protection, and shoot down the Orange dogs as you would the commonest vermin that afflict your premises.

“Should the Orangemen ever parade in New York, let the citizens who feel aggrieved at the violation of our laws and institutions take whatever measures they choose into their hands to uphold the laws, if they care any thing about their country. As for the Irish element, whose lives are aimed at by Orangemen, let them congregate on the tops of houses and at windows, provided with a few dozen of good hand grenades, say a couple of hundred at different points, and all the State militia that ever gathered together will hasten homeward as fast as their feet can carry them. Remember, that twenty thousand militia marching through New York streets are not equal to one hundred men situated as described. This to be had recourse to only in the event on the Orangemen being surrounded by police and military so deeply that they can not be reached, as on last 12<sup>th</sup> July. After that we shall have done with Orangeism in this city.” – [From the “Irish People,” August 19<sup>th</sup>.]

The first person the text is referring to, Mr. Beecher, is the Congregationalist clergyman Henry Ward Beecher, brother of author Harriet Beecher Stowe, important abolitionist, and well-known for his emphasis on God’s Love. Moreover, he sympathized with minorities, such as the suffragists, the temperance movement, and Chinese immigrants. The sentence “gospel-maker of cant and dollars, free love and anti-Irish hatreds” refers to these preachings. The name Jack Hoffman applies to John Thompson Hoffman, former mayor of New York City and governor of New York. His election was aided by Tammany Hall, a strong indication that he was a member of the Tweed Ring. After his re-election in 1870, Hoffman considered to run for the Presidency in 1872 with Boss Tweed as his manager. However, when Tweed’s corruption was revealed by *The New York Times* and *Harper’s Weekly*, Hoffman’s reputation was ruined.<sup>121</sup> It is therefore that ‘The Irish People’ from the above cited text mention his name, followed by “whose name will live to be execrated when your cowardly carcass is rotting.” The purpose of the text is clearly an ironic one: just like the simianized Paddy on the barrel, it underscores Nast’s conviction of the violent and savage politically active Irish Catholic.

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<sup>121</sup> Unknown, ‘John T. Hoffman, Mayor-elect of New York City,’ *Harper’s Weekly*, IX: 469 (December 23, 1865), <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1865/mayor-john-hoffman.htm>; Unknown, ‘Death of Ex-Gov. Hoffman; Stricken by Heart Disease in a Foreign Land. Sketch of His Life – How He Became Prominent in Politics and Suddenly Sank into Oblivion’, *The New York Times* (March 25, 1888), <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1865/mayor-john-hoffman.htm>

Another of Nast's cartoons that places emphasis on the stupidity and barbarity of the politically active Irishman, is the cartoon 'The Champion of the Fenians' (*figure 20*). The illustration caricatures the bizarre situation of Charles Francis Adams, son of President John Quincy Adams and

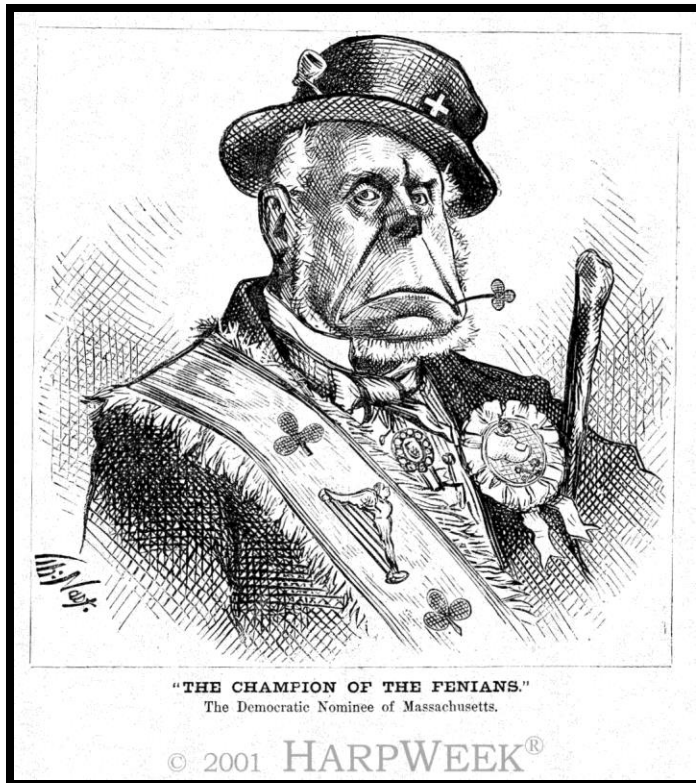


Figure 20. Thomas Nast, 'The Champion of the Fenians.' October 21, 1867. Source: *Harper's Weekly*.

grandson of President John Adams, and former U.S. minister to Britain, who was nominated for governor by the Massachusetts Democratic Party, a heavily Irish-American precinct.<sup>122</sup> Nast considered the nomination as obvious political self-interest and provides Adams with an Irish hat, pipe, harp, shamrocks, and a Latin cross to emphasize the underlying corruptness of the situation.

Furthermore, he gives Adams an unusually large lower jaw, long upper lip, and projecting mouth, while in real life Adams actually possessed quite round features. No one could possibly mistake these signs for anything other than the undesirable, dangerous, simian

Irishman. But if the reader did not understand these stereotypes, the word 'Fenian' in the title of the cartoon certainly provided an explanation, as it was a negative reference to politically active Irishmen. Interestingly, the image also includes a campaign button referencing to Nast's 1871 cartoon of Boss Tweed's thumb pushing down on New York City, an even greater indication for the corrupt nature of the Democratic Party.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> R. Kennedy, 'The Champion of the Fenians', *Harper's Weekly* (October 21, 1876), <http://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=October&Date=21>

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem.

## Other minorities and the Irish

During the mid-nineteenth century, the number of Chinese immigrants arriving on the East coast increased dramatically as a result of several disasters that had struck China. Victimized by population pressure, landlord oppression, starvation, and foreign imperialism, many peasant families in China lived on the edge of subsistence. When gold was found in California in 1848, it seemed the only way for many Chinese families to get their lives back on track.<sup>124</sup>

The growing amount of Chinese immigrants arriving in the United States became a controversial issue. There were several heated debates about the nature of cheap Chinese labor and how Chinese immigration affected America. While at first Chinese immigrant laborers were welcomed for their industrious and undemanding nature, they were later hated as a result of fluctuating employment levels. Anti-foreign voices, like those of the Know Nothings, declared that California's resources belonged to Americans and not to outsiders, especially not to the depraved, barbaric, devilish Chinese.<sup>125</sup>

As mentioned before, Nast was often quick to respond to the cause of the underprivileged, championing the rights of minorities in a time when much of America considered them undesirable. In the case of the Chinese, Nast believed they had as much right to live in the United States as any other immigrant (with the exception for Irish Catholics). These sympathies become apparent in his cartoon 'The Chinese Question' (figure 21). This illustration defends Chinese immigrants against the fierce prejudice and discrimination they faced during the late-nineteenth century, which involved many Irish Americans. *The New York Times* placed an article about this major role of the Irish against the Chinese:

"It is well known that the chief objection to the Chinese in California comes from the Irish. It was from this class that the Democratic Party used to draw most of the political capital which it gained by fostering the prejudices against the Negro. Fleeing this country, as they claimed, to escape British oppression, the Irish immigrant always made haste to join the ranks of the oppressors here. They voted, almost to a man, with the Democratic Party. (...) Now that slavery is abolished, we find them in the front ranks of the haters and persecutors of the Chinese."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> L.C. Hirata, 'Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America', *Signs*, 5:1, Women in Latin America (Autumn 1979), 4-5.

<sup>125</sup> Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 42-43; Hirata, 'Free, Indentured, Enslaved', 7; Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 95. J. Chang, 'Prostitution and Footbinding: Images of Chinese Womanhood in Late Nineteenth-Century San Francisco', [http://userwww.sfsu.edu/epf/journal\\_archive/volume\\_X,\\_2001/chang\\_j.pdf](http://userwww.sfsu.edu/epf/journal_archive/volume_X,_2001/chang_j.pdf) (January 22, 2015), 3;

<sup>126</sup> M. Walfred, 'The Chinese Question' (2014), <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/tag/the-chinese-question/>

Accompanying Nast's cartoon was a short *Harper's* editorial, 'The Heathen Chinese', which condemned the blame placed upon the Chinese for taking American jobs. To strengthen his Irish voter's trust, Boss Tweed restricted the use of Chinese laborers for the railroad construction. When he became a state senator, Tweed sponsored a bill to prevent the Chinese from being hired on projects. Violators could be fined between \$1000 and \$5000, imprisoned from six months to a year, or both. Although the number of Chinese immigrants in New York was quite small (it was estimated to be only 200 at the time), Tweed liked to spread fear among the white laborers by placing extra emphasis on the idea that the number of Chinese immigrants would increase dramatically in the years to come, and with that, steal American jobs. However, the article in *Harper's Weekly* refuted this 'Chinese invasion' and argued that most Americans "still adhere to the old Revolutionary doctrine that all men are free and equal before the law, and possess certain inalienable rights which even Mr. Tweed is bound to respect."<sup>127</sup>

Nast's cartoon demonstrates that sentiment, as Columbia, the feminine symbol of the United States, shields the Chinese man from the mob, whom she tries to remind that "America means fair play for all men." The armed mob includes stereotypes of an Irish American (figure 22), a German

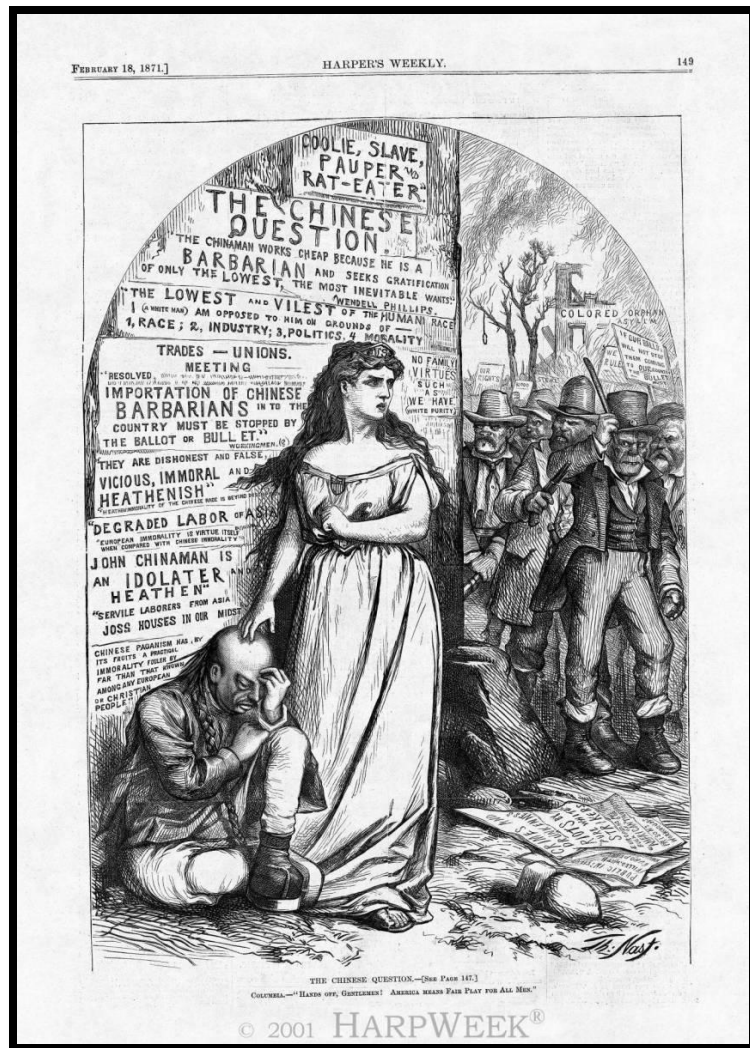


Figure 21. Thomas Nast, 'The Chinese Question.' February 18, 1871. Source: *Harper's Weekly*.

<sup>127</sup> R. Kennedy, 'The Chinese Question', *Harper's Weekly* (February 18, 1871) <http://www.harperweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=February&Date=18>; Walfred, 'The Chinese Question – February 18, 1871', <http://thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/01/03/the-chinese-question/>





Figure 22. Detail 'The Irish Question.'

American (far right), and a 'shoulder-hitter' (far left), whose job it was to carry out the will of politicians with threats or violence. The imagery in the background refers to the 1863 draft riots, and the wall behind Columbia is plastered with slurs against Chinese immigrants, labeling them as barbarians, heathens, pagans, immoral, anti-family, and vile.<sup>128</sup>

The front of the mob is almost completely occupied by the Irish American. Again, as in many other cartoons by Nast, he is recognizable through his stovepipe hat and striped breeches. Moreover, his face has both monstrous and simianized features, underscoring the brutal character of the Irishman and his inherent affinity with violence. The fact that he stands at the front of the mob, and not the German or the shoulder-hitter, does not only show Nast's personal distaste for the Irish, but also the fact that many Irish Americans were the first to cast down Chinese

immigrants. This as a result of the fact that before these great numbers of Chinese laborers arrived, the Irish were the preferred choice for workforce on the railroads, especially in California. However, the Irish were not averse of booze, which affected their ability to work, and when they went on strike in 1865, many railroad companies were forced to hire Chinese laborers, who proved to be excellent, loyal workers. Suddenly many Irish Americans found themselves without a job, and believed the Chinese were the ones to blame and needed to suffer for their alleged crimes.<sup>129</sup>

As a fervent Republican, Nast also championed the rights of African Americans. This becomes apparent in his depictions of blacks created between 1860 and 1870, which can be considered exceptionally kind and often free of the racial stereotypes that would soon become popular in American visual culture. However, when African Americans crossed his political agenda, Nast's sympathy for them suddenly disappeared and was turned into sordid criticism. Blacks became Coon-like, ignorant figures with thick lips, broad smiles, and effeminate features – characteristics that derived from minstrel shows.<sup>130</sup>

This notion is especially shown in Nast's famous illustration 'The Ignorant Vote – Honors are Easy', which depicts an ignorant Southern African-American voter sitting on a scale across from an ignorant Northern Irish voter (*figure 24*). Here, Nast's seeming negrophobia can be considered in line with his other cartoons of African Americans, as he believed politics more important than religion or race. If someone – black or white – got in the way of his beloved Republican Party, Nast would make sure that person would regret it.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Kennedy, 'The Chinese Question'; Walfred, 'The Chinese Question – February 18, 1871'.

<sup>129</sup> Rutter, 43.

<sup>130</sup> M. Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago 2013), 26-28; Justice, 178 and 201.

<sup>131</sup> Justice, 201; Forker, 66.

Through this cartoon, Nast criticized the equality of corruption between a Northern Democrat, depicted as an Irishman with simian features, and a Southern Republican, depicted as a Coon-like African American. The image argues that both sides were balanced in their tendency for voter fraud in the upcoming elections, and can be considered a perfect example with regard to the earlier mentioned whiteness studies-debate. In the eyes of Nast, the depicted Irishman is seen as ‘white’, whatever his other deficiencies. However, as fervent Democrats, the politics of the Irishman formed a bigger threat to Nast’s Republicanism than the politics of the black man, which gave him enough reason to emphasize the Irishman’s barbarity through assigning him heavily simianized features. When blacks did not vote the way Nast preferred, they were portrayed with negative racial stereotypes as well, though the Irish stereotypes were more focused on violence and savagery and the black stereotypes more on stupidity. After all, the Irishman’s sin was his behavior – his excessive love for alcohol, corruption, and his poverty; the black man’s sin was his inherent childish stupidity, his intellectual inability to gain citizenship. Here, the Irishman’s sin was considered far greater because it was his choice to behave like a barbarian, not his destiny, and because of his whiteness he was more innately capable than the African American.<sup>132</sup> Thus, it seems that Nast’s extreme distaste for the Irish was based on the fact that because they were white, they should have known better, even though traits as violence, corruption, alcoholism and poverty was inherent to the Irish ethnicity. African Americans were born ignorant and there was nothing they could do about it, but the Irish eventually could because of their skin color. It was therefore that the fault of the Irish was even greater, as they had the possibility to

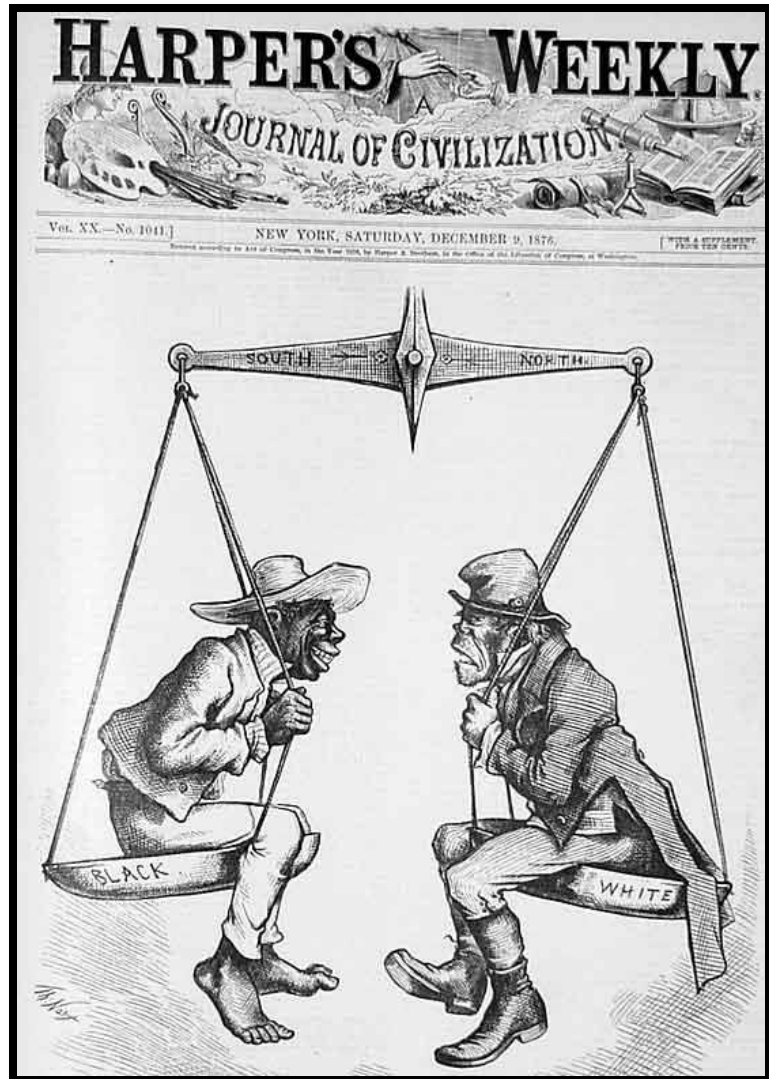


Figure 24. Thomas Nast, ‘The Ignorant Vote – Honors are Easy.’ December 9, 1876. Source: *Harper’s Weekly*.

<sup>132</sup> Curtis, 60; Pearl, 189-191; Justice, 201 and 203; Forker, 66.

think like white men, but they chose not to do so. Consequently, it can be argued that the Irish were never seen as anything other than white by Nast and his contemporaries.

### **Conclusion**

Nast's critical drawings of the Irish were primarily based on a combination of personal and political experiences. Although the exact point of when his abhorrence grew is unclear, his cartoons provide us with a valuable reference point. During the 1860s, several riots took place in which many Irish Catholics played an important and destructive role. Interestingly, the first cartoon Nast drew from this, does not contain any references to Irish Catholics being ape-like. This might be a result of the accompanying article in *Harper's Weekly*, but also from the lack of interest in the physiognomic aspects within American caricature. However, in the cartoon of the St. Patrick's Day riot that Nast drew several years later, he most certainly did provide the Irish with heavily simianized features. By this time, interest in physiognomy might have grown in the United States and the simianized Paddy started to take root in American caricature tradition.

Yet, in light of Nast's personal background this detestation can be considered quite paradoxical. Born in a small German village, politically divided as a result of many wars between France and Germany, possibly raised a Catholic, and an immigrant himself, one would think that Nast would have sympathized with the Irish Americans. Especially considering his Republican beliefs and his tendency to champion the rights of minorities, like African Americans. Because Irish Catholics often tended to join the Democratic Party, which was anti-abolitionist in its essence, Nast was provided with a strong reason to dislike them. Furthermore, during the riots from the 1860s, which included many Irish Catholics, several African American targets were attacked. It was these events that fueled Nast's hatred for the Irish, and, however paradoxical this might seem, in the context of political and scientific events, these feelings can actually be considered quite logical. It must therefore be emphasized that Nast's criticism and sordid stereotypes were very much in line with his other cartoons, as well as popular beliefs about certain groups in American society. The notion that Nast often used stereotypes to underscore the faults of these groups can be seen as not only the basics of the art of caricature, but also as a result of the period he lived in. His extreme dislike of the Irish was based on the fact that they refused to make use of their white intellect and chose to behave like barbarians, like apes, or as African Americans if you will. It can therefore be argued that the Irish were never seen as unwhite by Nast and his contemporaries, despite their annoying and barbaric behavior. These simian-like features were used only to emphasize this choice of conduct, maybe even their place on the evolutionary ladder, but not their alleged darker skin color.

## Conclusion

Thomas Nast's cartoons in *Harper's Weekly* can be considered a good representation of late nineteenth-century American views on Irish immigrants in terms of race and social status. Nast was a product of upcoming American traditions and beliefs, influenced by European trends as a consequence of increasing immigration. As more and more Irish immigrants entered the United States after the Great Famine, levels of nativism started to rise. Many Americans regarded the Irish as a threat to Americanism because most were unskilled, uneducated, and worst of all, Catholic. In a country founded on Protestant beliefs, Catholicism was considered a highly superstitious religion, possibly even with an agenda: the pope claimed himself to be infallible and insisted on the primacy of the Church in matters of culture, science, and education, thereby confirming the suspicion of many Protestants worldwide that the Church was hostile to their cherished liberal nationalism. Thus, for native-born Americans this meant a threat to their way of life. Moreover, Nast and many other Americans believed that the pope saw a chance to convert the United States, and as a result of that belief, Irish Catholics were definitely not welcome.

Although Nast's cartoons echoed the popular nativist beliefs from the Know-Nothing Party, one must keep in mind that his art cannot be considered 'anti-Catholic' in essence. His cartoons only heavily criticized the Catholic Church's entrance into the domain of public policy, not the church in general, contrary to what many Americans might have believed. His cartoons can be considered mostly political and anticlerical, especially with regard to the notion that the Catholic flock could not think for themselves, which is frequently reflected in Nast's stereotyped depictions of the Irish.

Moreover, as can be seen from Nast's cartoons, Irish Catholics tended to be violent and frequently disturbed the order, an important reason for many Americans, including Nast, to despise them. But the fact that Irish immigrants often joined the Democratic Party – a party hostile to minorities, abolitionism, and notorious for their corruption – predominated Nast's vicious cartoons. One can conclude from this that although the British and European use of physiognomy in caricatures was gaining popularity in the United States during the late-nineteenth century, politics still dominated in American caricature traditions. This was especially the case for Nast: his devotion to his Republican political cause, usually trumped his commitment to the supposed virtues underlying its rhetoric. Race and religion mattered less to Nast than political behavior.

This notion can be seen, for example, in Nast's drawings from the 1860s and 1870s, in which African Americans were frequently depicted without the stereotypes that would become popular from the late-nineteenth century onwards. One can conclude from this that Nast positioned African Americans above the Irish with regard to their humanity, but only if they did not cross his political agenda. If they did, Nast ruthlessly turned them into Coon-like caricatures with thick lips, frizzy hair, and an exceptionally broad smile: stereotypes that derived from minstrelsy. Yet they remained harmless, in contrast to the Irish who were considered dangerous and threatening, a notion that was

visualized in cartoons through imagery of heavily simianized monsters with violent tendencies. Nast's placement of blacks above whites is, however, an exaggeration and can only be found in his cartoons. In reality he may not have actually believed in such a racial hierarchy, something that can be extracted from his later work. In fact, Benjamin Justice argues that his comparison of blacks and whites might be regarded as irony, for "Irish Catholic degradation was so extreme as to put them below blacks." This notion is emphasized by the popular nineteenth-century science of physiognomy that placed the Irish closer to the top of the evolutionary tree, near the Anglo-Saxons, than those of African descent. After all, even though the Irish were despised by the English, and all possible reasons were put forward to confirm the belief they were part of a different group or race, they were positioned higher in society than blacks because of their whiteness.<sup>133</sup> This view is very much shown in Nast's drawings, especially in his cartoon 'The Ignorant Vote', in which he emphasizes the difference between the Irishman's sin and the black man's sin: the latter being innately simpleminded and the first having a choice in this matter because of his skin color, but choosing the wrong option. It can therefore be argued that Nast's work supports recent whiteness scholarship in that the Irish were never seen as anything different than white by him and his contemporaries, whatever their deficiencies in behavior and life choices might have been.

The main function of stereotyping has always been to frame individuals in recognizable groups. However, historian John Appel points out that we can no longer see Nast's cartoons "in their nineteenth-century, more neutral connotations without considerable efforts of the historical imagination." Nast's illustrations demonstrate that these stereotypes frequently derived from the belief that the superiority or inferiority of some races was biologically determined; that there was a connection between social status, race, nationality and religion; and that everyone had equal access to opportunities in the United States, as proven by the fact that most immigrants like Nast ended up doing quite well, as did most Irish Catholics. For many of us today these beliefs may seem odd, but we have to keep in mind that "hardly any ethnic or religious group was entirely exempted from ridicule at one time or another."<sup>134</sup> Even though Nast's critical cartoons may not affect us in the same way as they affected his contemporaries, his drawings still give us an interesting insight in nineteenth-century discourse. Because Nast's cartoons were shaped by popular notions and events of that time, it can be argued that his caricatures in *Harper's Weekly* provide us with an excellent representation of late-nineteenth-century American views on Irish immigrants in terms of race and social status.

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<sup>133</sup> Pearl, 190-191; Justice, 178.

<sup>134</sup> Appel, 'From Shanties to Lace Curtains', 374-375.

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