

The Burden of Factionalism in Nineteenth-Century Irish Nationalist Movements

Josh Robison

Josh Robison is a graduate student in History from Effingham, IL. Josh wrote this paper for Dr. Beck's History 5400, Imperialism, during the fall of 2008.

They saw that now they lacked their full strength and great name, no one took notice of them or spoke to them. When they saw this, they lay down on the side of the hill at Tara, put their lips to the earth, and died.³⁰⁷

In the spring of 1866, less than a year after the end of the American Civil War, veteran combatants from both sides of that conflict invaded the British North American territory of Canada. These soldiers staged a two-pronged attack: one from Buffalo, New York, and the other from St. Albans, Vermont. They planned to use a vanquished Canada as a bargaining tool to coerce the British Empire into releasing its grip on Ireland, creating a sovereign Irish Republic.³⁰⁸ The invasion failed, however.

These soldiers were members of an Irish-American nationalist organization known as the Fenian Brotherhood, a society dedicated to the establishment of an independent Irish state through the violent removal of British influence. Fenian Brotherhood adopted their name from the Fianna, an ancient band of Celtic warriors led by the mythological folk hero Fiona Mac Cumhaill, who earned fame throughout Gaelic culture as the defender of Ireland. The exiled Irish nationalist, John O' Mahoney founded The Fenian Brotherhood in New York City in 1858. Fellow expatriate James Stephens led The Irish counterpart, the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood.³⁰⁹

From a geopolitical standpoint their failure is not surprising. St. George's Channel separates the southeastern edge of Ireland from England by less than one hundred miles. The proximity of the islands, however, along with the intense disparities between their martial capacities, is only part of the equation. Another crucial component relates to the problem of Irish identity itself, not only as to how the British viewed the Irish, but how the Irish viewed themselves. The British considered the Irish as the "other" despite their shared histories. The British portrayed the Irish as hovelling, Catholic barbarians ill-suited for self-rule. While the British saw *themselves* as "British," the Irish defined themselves in ambiguous terms; no all-encompassing "Irish" identity existed.

³⁰⁷ One account of the end of the Fianna, legendary Celtic folk warriors and defenders of Ireland.

Fergus Fleming and Shahrugh Husain, *Heroes of the Dawn: Celtic Myth* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 1996), 68.

³⁰⁸ Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1966), 40.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

The Fenians failed, in part, because they struggled against near insurmountable odds. However, the Fenians also failed, as did many Irish nationalists before and after them, due to a lack of a coherent strategy. They failed due to infighting and bickering and ill-defined objectives. The Irish nationalists failed because they saw themselves as the other, much like the British.

English antagonism towards Ireland has long historical roots. In the 1530's, Protestant rulers, beginning with King Henry VIII, attempted to subjugate the Catholic population. William of Orange's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1688 solidified Protestant English control of Ireland. By this time, most of the Catholic ruling families were either dead or living in exile on the Continent.³¹⁰ Thus began a period known as the Protestant Ascendancy, when colonists, reinforced by the might of the English government, imposed a crippling system of social, political and economic controls against the Catholic majority. The English confiscated most of the land and reallocated it to approximately ten-thousand Protestant families, reducing the vast majority of the Catholic population to the level of peasant laborers.³¹¹ The English established Penal Codes, which prohibited Catholics from buying or inheriting land, in the late 1600s.³¹² Driven by the need to raise livestock or cash crops, Catholics with larger farms exploited those of lesser means. While the English treated Catholic tenant farmers poorly, these farmers treated their Irish agricultural laborers in an even worse fashion.³¹³ Catholics could not participate in the English controlled parliament in Dublin.³¹⁴ However, from this very Parliament the seeds of Irish nationalism began to take root as the increasingly revolutionary-minded eighteenth-century drew to a close.

With British soldiers busy in the American colonies, Irish Protestants decided to form themselves into companies of armed volunteers in an effort to defend the island from the potential of opportunistic Continental exploitation. Two parliamentary leaders, Henry Flood and Henry Grattan, opted to use the offensive capabilities of this body, which numbered forty-thousand by 1780, to insist on economic and political reforms, particularly legislative independence from England. Grattan succeeded in this venture in 1782, when the English government granted the Dublin body partial parliamentary autonomy. However, even in

³¹⁰ Kerby Miller and Paul Wagner, *Out of Ireland: The Story of Irish Emigration to America* (Washington: Elliott and Clark Publishing, 1994), 18.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Edward M. Levine, *The Irish and Irish Politicians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 4.

³¹³ Miller and Wagner, 19.

³¹⁴ Brown, 4.

“Grattan’s Parliament,” British government patronage controlled nearly two-thirds of the elected members.³¹⁵

Within this relatively relaxed political environment, the Society of United Irishmen formed, first in Belfast, then in Dublin, in 1791. The Society, led by Protestant lawyer Theobald Wolfe Tone, sought to end British rule. The success of revolutionary efforts in France increased both the boldness of the Society and the attention of their opponents, and in 1794 the organization was declared illegal and driven underground. As a result, the United Irishmen reorganized themselves into a secret, oath-bound society whose goal was to create a nationwide, military network in preparation for an insurrection that now seemed inevitable.³¹⁶

The rebellion that began on May 26, 1798 in Wexford, failed to meet its objective.³¹⁷ Unlike the Young Ireland insurrection of 1848, however, or any of the Fenian exercises in the 1860's, this uprising, led by Catholic priests and acted out by thousands of pike-wielding peasants, was particularly brutal and relatively long.³¹⁸ An estimated 30,000 people were killed before the six-week ordeal was finally snuffed out on June 21.³¹⁹ The rebellion failed for a number of logistical reasons: poor organization on the part of the rebels, vastly superior strength on the part of the government, and inadequate aid on the part of the French. Ideological differences between the combatants themselves also contributed to the failure of the insurrection. Whereas Protestant aristocrats revolted against British political control, Catholic peasants fought and died in an attempt to alleviate social grievances.³²⁰ Rather than uniting Irish patriots in a common cause, the Wexford uprising antagonized tensions between these factions. Even more damning, it also led to increased British control of Ireland through the Act of Union in 1801.

William Pitt, the Prime Minister, believed that the Act of Union would allow Westminster to govern the island more efficiently and also alleviate at least some Catholic animosity toward the Protestant Parliament in Dublin. Pitt succeeded in his efforts, but not without considerable effort and loss of political capital on both islands. Many Britons, for example, saw Ireland as a useless liability, whereas Irish Parliamentarians were concerned by what they saw as the waning of their political clout. The Union and the violence that preceded it soon found a place within the ideological framework of later nationalists, men who saw the destruction of

³¹⁵ Roy Douglas, Liam Harte, and Jim O’Hara, *Ireland since 1690: A Concise History* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press Limited, 1999), 20.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

³¹⁷ Miller and Wagner, 21.

³¹⁸ Brown, 6.

³¹⁹ Douglas, Harte, and O’Hara, 20.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

the Act as their paramount objective, and the use of violence as a historically justifiable means to an end.³²¹

For the half a century 1798 uprising, there would be no more large scale violence against the British, due, in part, to the efforts of Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell, a Catholic born in County Kerry in 1775, dedicated himself to the cause of Catholic emancipation. Both a staunch royalist and social conservative, O'Connell had no interest in the revolutionary theatrics of the United Irishmen, instead advocating peaceful coexistence within the larger British Empire. He created the Catholic Association in 1823, arguing that his countrymen could be loyal subjects even to a Protestant king if they were given representation in Parliament.³²²

In 1828, O'Connell brazenly stood for election to Parliament against a government candidate. As a Catholic, he was barred from civil service and thus the results would only be relevant if he lost. But O'Connell won the election. Fearing increased animosity from angry Catholic peasants, however, Parliament relented and passed the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, which allowed Catholics to enter Parliament and hold high civil and military office. Flush with victory, O'Connell formed a second organization, the Society for the Repeal of the Union, in 1830, again arguing that such legislation would strengthen Irish loyalty to the British crown. Unsuccessful in this venture, he nonetheless continued his efforts and finally, after ten years, founded the Loyal National Repeal Association. This organization was strengthened in 1842 by the addition of a new group of allies who called themselves the Young Irelanders.³²³

Led by Thomas Davis, a Protestant barrister from Cork, the Young Irelanders were middle class intellectuals who sought a pluralist, non-sectarian movement to remove British influence in Ireland.³²⁴ The Young Irelanders were also cultural and religious purists. They supported a revival of the Gaelic language and believed in a devote adherence to strict moral standards.³²⁵ O'Connell, in contrast, carried his Catholicism loosely, had little interest in the promotion of the Gaelic language, and frowned upon the revolutionary zeal which he considered to be plaguing the rest of Europe.³²⁶ Thus, while their ultimate goals and tactics were never entirely synchronized, these forces nonetheless saw themselves on the same side in a larger struggle against a common opponent. These ideological differences may have been overlooked had O'Connell's political authority not been seriously compromised by events which occurred in October of 1843.

³²¹ Ibid., 30.

³²² Ibid., 34.

³²³ Ibid., 35, 36.

³²⁴ Ibid., 37.

³²⁵ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

³²⁶ Brown, 7.

O'Connell had scheduled a "monster meeting" near Dublin. These immensely popular, open-air gatherings gave O'Connell the chance to use his impressive speaking abilities to invigorate massive crowds of already dissatisfied Irish. Despite his alleged loyalty to the throne, the government became less enthusiastic about such gatherings as they grew in popularity and eventually decided to ban them altogether. Reluctant to risk violence, O'Connell cancelled the meeting, a decision Young Ireland leaders saw as a weakness. Eventually O'Connell began to move toward more conventional parliamentary tactics in his efforts, even going so far as to forge an alliance with the Whig party that came to power in June of 1846.³²⁷

Such tactics did not sit well with the increasingly impatient Young Ireland leadership, who saw a permanent fracture between Irish and British society as the only way to achieve their goals. As they declared in *The Nation*, the Young Ireland journal, "To make our people politically free but bond slaves to some debasing social system like that which crowds the mines and factories of England with squalid victims, we would not strike a blow."³²⁸

The inevitable break with the O'Connellites came in 1846 when the Repeal Association officially condemned violence as a political tool. While no such violence was being planned, the Young Irelanders withdrew from the organization. They shared the view with most romantic nationalists that the forceful removal of a corrupt government was a justifiable course of action.³²⁹

In early 1847, Young Ireland leader Smith O'Brien formed the Irish Confederation, which sought the immediate restoration of Irish government. O'Connell's death that same year accelerated the development of this more radical ideology amongst nationalists. Another such radical, John Mitchell, left the Irish Confederation in February of 1848 to focus on *The United Irishman*, a newspaper devoted to revolutionary rhetoric.³³⁰ The relatively bloodless removal of the French monarchy that same month convinced many Irish nationalists that such success could be duplicated on their island.³³¹

On March 2, British authorities arrested Mitchell, O'Brien and others on charges of sedition, and two months later declared their organization illegal. This declaration led to the Ballinacorney insurrection, where Young Irelanders attempted to initiate a revolution by leading a handful of starving Munster peasants into armed conflict with British government officials.³³² The so-called rebellion ended in disaster, and on October 9, 1848, O'Brien was sentenced to the standard rebel fate.

³²⁷ Douglas, Harte, and O'Hara, 37, 38.

³²⁸ Brown, 8.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³³⁰ Douglas, Harte, and O'Hara, 38, 39.

³³¹ Brown, 12.

³³² Douglas, Harte, and O'Hara, 39.

However, before he was decapitated and his limbs given the standard British tour, O'Brien, a romantic to the end, declared, "Having failed, I know my life is forfeited [...] for Ireland I shall carefully surrender life itself."³³³

Thus, it was not lack of enthusiasm that kept Irish nationalists from success. Perhaps Thomas N. Brown offers the most thorough analysis of the Ballingarry fiasco:

These events pointed to the difficulties nationalists faced in trying to overthrow so resolute and confident a people as the British with so divided a people as the Irish. The richest and most powerful Irish—the Anglo-Irish—were committed to the British connection. The middle classes were too few in number and too unsure of themselves to go it alone. Peasant support was imperative [...] but hard to command [...] peasant and nationalist conceived of Ireland in different ways. The Young Irelander wanted the peasant to act in the name of an abstraction called the Irish nation, but his loyalties inhered in more concrete relationships—those of the family, the parish, the village and Whiteboy society. The peasant followed leaders, not principles [...] and looked to the priest or the landlord or both for leadership.³³⁴

The British, of course, disagreed with each other over multiple issues and they represented, at the time, one of the most socially stratified nations on Earth. However, like a moody family capable of pasting on a smiling face while dining in public, Great Britain in the nineteenth-century confronted the outside world behind a unified front. No such uniformity existed in Ireland between the Catholic peasant and the middle-class Protestant.

Though the failures of 1848 did spell the end of Young Ireland as a political force, blood was not spilt entirely in vain. Veterans of the uprising moved further underground for the time being and began to plot their revenge.³³⁵ In time the uprising, despite its lack of success, assumed an almost mythic significance as a bridge gapping the history of revolutionary nationalism, from those involved in the 1798 insurrection to the movement that came next.

Before discussing the Fenian movement in depth, one must examine the way in which intense Irish migration to North America, along with the horrific suffering that exacerbated such an exodus, affected these Irish-American nationalists. Descendants of Protestant colonists

³³³ Robert Sloan, *William Smith O'Brien and the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, Ltd., 2000), 295.

³³⁴ Brown, 12, 13.

³³⁵ Jackson, 17.

owned almost all the farmland in Ireland. These landowners rented out their plots to Irish Catholics of middling means, who in turn sublet smaller plots to poorer and poorer farmers. By 1841, a population of eight-million Irish were plugged into a social pyramid that consisted of an often absentee-landlord at the top, tenant farmers that rented out smaller parcels to cottiers in the middle, who in turn offered work to landless agricultural laborers, peasants who barely grew enough food to survive.³³⁶

Almost half the population of Ireland depended on the potato for existence. Nutritious and simple to grow, the success of the crop in most years allowed for rapid population growth amongst those most dependent. When the crop failed or succumbed to blight, the results were cruel. Though there were actually a number of potato famines throughout the nineteenth-century, between 1845 and 1848 the disease became especially virulent. The death rates became so terrible that mass burials became commonplace. Due to the Act of Union, the famine was, legally, just as much a British problem as an Irish one. Such legislative technicalities were not born out in practice. While the government provided some aid relief, help was laughable at best; the British government eventual apologized for its neglect of the dire situation.³³⁷

The famine exacerbated migration and increased Anglophobia among the Irish. Like pouring a can of petrol on an already angry flame, British reaction to the famine provided more than enough evidence for many nationalists that the Act of Union was insincere and that British influence on the Island had to be ended. Many Irishmen and even some members of Parliament saw in British famine policies as more than mere neglect.³³⁸ Those Irish who did migrate to North America carried with them a considerable amount of anti-English sentiment.

The Irish, of course, has been immigrating to the United States well before the 1840s. As a democracy, the United States was an obvious choice for political refugees from both the 1798 uprising and the insurrection of 1848. By 1860, these refuges and their descendants, coupled with famine survivors, numbered more than 1.6 million, with the overwhelming majority of them arriving between 1847 and 1854, the height of the famine-induced misery.³³⁹

However, these large numbers do not indicate American hospitality. Though many politicians welcomed the Irish for their votes and capitalists welcomed them for their labor, many Americans were unimpressed by the arrival of people they deemed “unruly.” Harsh treatment from families who had been living in the country for over one generation only strengthened Irish-American nationalism. Like all

³³⁶ Douglas, Harte, and O’Hara, 40.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40, 41, 45, 50.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

³³⁹ Brian Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American Relations during Reconstruction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 6, 23.

immigrants, loneliness played a key role in the Irish-American experience, and this loneliness led to the establishment of Irish-American social clubs and fraternities.³⁴⁰ Outside of Ireland, a common “Irish” identity was beginning to strengthen.

The leaders of both the American and Irish branches of the Fenian movement were Young Ireland exiles. John O’Mahony journeyed to the United States after the uprising in 1848 while Stephens escaped to mainland Europe only to return to Ireland in 1856. Correspondence between the Fenians in the U.S. and the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood in Ireland, indicate that, while the actual rebellion would take place in Ireland, support for the venture, both financial and military, would come from the United States. Stephens met with O’Mahony during a tour of America, and, before he returned to Ireland in January, he delegated his old ally as “supreme organizer and Director of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood in America.” American Fenianism began in New York, but O’Mahony was charged with the laborious project of extending the movement throughout the United States.³⁴¹

“It is but natural that our progress should be slow at first,” O’Mahony wrote in April of 1859, “particularly as our finances do not yet warrant us in sending round agents to the different centres of the Irish-American population...We must calculate upon a certain amount of opposition from some of the priests...Those who denounce us go beyond their duty as clergymen.”³⁴²

The controversy between the Fenians as a secret, oath-bound society and the Catholic Church had followed the nationalists to America, much to the chagrin of the Brotherhood.³⁴³ No insurrection could succeed without vast numbers, and, since the church was closely linked to the lives of most Irish-Americans, these numbers would be difficult to accumulate.

Many rebels in Ireland wanted to strike immediately, and it was not long before similar impatience spread to the United States. As a result, O’Mahony traveled to Dublin in 1860 to examine how the funds he had sent across the Atlantic were being spent. The two leaders sat down and discussed specifics: The revolution needed at least 5000 disciplined men,, complete with competent officers leading them, and the Brotherhood must acquire at least 50,000 rifles and muskets. However, considerably more guns than this would soon be in the hands of even more Irish-Americans fighting in the Civil War, a dilemma that struck both men as a disaster.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Brown, 18.

³⁴¹ William D’Arcy, *The Fenian Movement in the United States: 1858-1886* (New York: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 12.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴³ George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 180.

³⁴⁴ D’Arcy, 16-18.

Ironically, in the long run, the American Civil War did more to help the Fenian cause than hinder it. Despite the lament of the Boston Pilot on May 4, 1861, "The first enemies the 69th will encounter will, in all probability, be Irishmen...what a spectacle this is. There they stand...thousands of miles from the land which it would be their common pride to defend," Fenian membership expanded during the Civil War.³⁴⁵ And, despite nativist concerns to the contrary, Irish-Americans joined the ranks in droves. The impetus was both financial, many enlistees were offered bounties of 600 dollars or more, and ideological, particularly after Great Britain lent support to the Confederacy. Army recruits focused on this British involvement, arguing that the military training soldiers would receive would prove invaluable in the "coming struggle" for Irish freedom. Estimates indicate that anywhere from 150,000 to 200,000 Irish-Americans served in the Union armies alone.³⁴⁶

In the mean time, however, Fenian leadership believed that something was needed to keep the Brotherhood on the minds of Irish-Americans who might otherwise be tempted to focus on more obvious concerns. Another veteran of 1848, Terrence McManus, played his role in the patriotic drama by dying in San Francisco at the beginning of 1861. McManus's funeral procession, from California to Chicago to New York and finally to Dublin, became a mass Fenian demonstration. How cruel a fate, the nationalists decried, that such a man should die so far from his ancestral home. On September 18, the well-traveled remains of Terrence McManus were placed onto the steamship "Glasgow" and set off to Ireland. Fate smiled again on the nationalist cause when Archbishop Colton refused to offer mass for the rebel. Now the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood was more than just another secret society; they were patriots whom the Church persecuted by the Church in their valiant fight to free Ireland.³⁴⁷ Stephens could not have designed a better recruitment tool.

O'Mahony took advantage of the increased Anglophobia in the United States to continue his recruitment efforts. Under normal circumstances Washington would not have tolerated such behavior, particularly during wartime. However, with the British building Confederate warship, Washington not only allowed but encouraged Fenian activity. Members of the Armies of the Cumberland, the Potomac and the Tennessee were allowed to travel to Chicago in 1863 for the very first Fenian convention.

The movement started to take on a more "American" tone. Delegates drafted a constitution that created an Irish government in exile.³⁴⁸ Some believed that O'Mahony's power was still too centralized,

³⁴⁵ Brown, 38.

³⁴⁶ John Duff, *The Irish in the United States* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), 20, 21.

³⁴⁷ D'Arcy, 19.

³⁴⁸ Jenkins, 28.

however, and he himself was too hesitant to act, thus another convention was held in Philadelphia two years later. At the 1865 convention, the office of the Head Centre was abolished and replaced by an elected President answerable to a General Congress. O'Mahony left the Philadelphia convention with much of his autocratic influence gone, and two months later the Senate deposed him as President, insisting he step aside. He refused.³⁴⁹

“Cut and hack the rotten branches around you.” Stephens wrote to him, infuriated by the Americanization of the cause. Once again the burden of factionalism crept into the movement. Invoking the Chicago constitution, O'Mahony commanded one wing of the movement while the Senate led the other, which was now more popular with Irish-Americans because its form of government was more American in nature.³⁵⁰

The Civil War ended in April of 1865, and thousands of Irish-American soldiers who had fought and survived the violence focused their energies on a common enemy. Enthusiasm was high, as many Fenians, soldiers and leaders, assumed that once the war ended, the United States would naturally take Great Britain to task for its belligerent support of the now vanquished Confederacy.³⁵¹ However, this would not be the case. The Fenians had mistaken the prevailing anti-English mood of the last half-decade as pro-Irish sentiment, while most Americans, were not too impressed with either group. While Americans focused their animosity toward the English government and not necessarily its citizens, the exact opposite was true for the Irish.³⁵² Thus, the best the Fenians could hope for on the part of the U.S. government was to let them exist unhindered, and, because the Irish-American population represented such a powerful voting block, Fenian activity was allowed to flourish.

At this point in time, the Catholic church could no longer justify its animosity toward the Brotherhood due to its status as a “secret-society,” as very little about the nationalist movement was secret. A *New York Times* article from September 15 of 1865 explained, “...it will be seen the British government are becoming so alarmed at the progress of Fenianism in Ireland that they have determined to increase the military force stationed in that portion of the United Kingdom.”³⁵³ The January 12, 1866 edition of the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the Fenian congress “has elected a Central Council to take the place of the Senate...at the Senate headquarters, President Roberts has sent instructions to the Brotherhood to purchase arms for their members. The arms which the circle are to procure are Springfield muskets [...] It is reported that preparations are being made

³⁴⁹ Brown, 38.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁵¹ D'Arcy, 63.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁵³ *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 15, 1865.

for the purchase of large quantities of war material at seventy-five percent less than the usual cost.”³⁵⁴

It is difficult now to imagine the boldness with which the Fenians then acted. Here was an Irish-American government acting within the U.S. government, openly making military preparations against a sovereign world power. We can only conclude that the attack on Canada, though certainly a bold course of action, was not as quixotic a plot as one might assume. Many influential Americans considered the annexation of Canada as a reasonable compensation for British behavior during the course of the last half-decade. William R. Roberts, a wealthy American merchant and leader in the Fenian movement, believed that an invasion of Canada might instigate actual war between the United States and Great Britain, thus paving the way for Irish independence.³⁵⁵

Evidence indicates that senior members of the American government knew about the Fenian plot, and that a Fenian “diplomat” broached the subject with both President Johnson and Secretary of State Seward themselves and was told that while the U.S. government could not officially condone such behavior, it would “acknowledge accomplished facts” as it pertained to the potential success of such a venture.³⁵⁶

As mentioned, however, the Fenian invasion of Canada failed, and U.S. troops did, in fact, arrest the combatants once Canadian troops had driven them back.³⁵⁷ The quick defeat had as much to do with the earnestness with which the British and Canadian governments took Fenian activity in the days leading up to the attack as it did with the audacity of the initial plot. The British had heard rumors of an invasion as early as 1864, and had deployed additional troops along the Canadian border.³⁵⁸ Here is an excerpt from a *New York Times* article from March 10, 1866, mere days before the invasion, “The government buildings and all the banks in Ottawa have been placed under military guard at night. There has been a most enthusiastic response throughout Canada to the call for volunteers, and ten thousand men are already marching toward the frontier.”³⁵⁹ A month before, another article from another American newspaper commented on the approaching invasion. It merits inclusion here at length due to its discussion of Fenian infighting:

In the Fenian addresses recently delivered, both by the O’Mahony and Roberts leaders, it appears that the true reason of the division between the Roberts and O’Mahony factions is that the former proposes to invade Canada and the latter would make the

³⁵⁴ *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 12, 1866.

³⁵⁵ Brown, 39.

³⁵⁶ D’Arcy, 84.

³⁵⁷ Brown, 40.

³⁵⁸ Jenkins, 34.

³⁵⁹ *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 10, 1866.

campaign direct against Ireland...General Sweeny, President Roberts, and the Senate, confess that they have arrived at the conclusion that the original plan of freeing Ireland by raising the standard of revolt in that country would be insane. Probably the O'Mahony faction perceive[s] that the plan of invading Canada is still more insane. In Ireland the invading force might possibly be joined by a considerable portion of the people. In Canada it would be met by a resistance as united as it would encounter on the coast of Cornwall or Wales. The invaders would probably be disposed of as summarily as were the Filibusters under Lopez in Cuba. The project of conquering Canada with 16,000 men as a base of operations from which to attack Ireland, is worthy of that rich Irish imagination from which it emanates. Meanwhile, it seems very clear that such projects are a palpable violation of our neutrality laws.³⁶⁰

A final raid on Canada was attempted in 1870, but by this time the political winds had shifted. The incoming President Grant informed his cabinet that he would no longer offer the Fenians the privilege of the "organization of a government within the U.S." The Fenian Senate was now reluctant to commit the Brotherhood to battle, fearing the erosion of their political clout. As Brown writes: "Irish-American nationalism was directed chiefly toward American, not Irish, ends. A free Ireland would reflect glory on the Fenians, but of more immediate and practical value was use of the Brotherhood as an American pressure group." Wealthier American-Irish became even more opposed to the violence because it kept the Irish viewed as "a distinct nationality in the midst of the American population."³⁶¹

The Irish transformed into the "other" for many Irish-Americans who were becoming more and more determined to create a new life for themselves in the United States. That Irish immigrants or their children did not forget about the homeland, as donations towards the burgeoning Home Rule movement and other nationalist groups continued throughout the rest of the century and up until 1916.³⁶² However, the battle to purge British influence from Irish soil would be fought *on* Irish soil, by Irishmen. The zenith of Fenianism was over.

As Irish nationalism twisted its way toward the violence of 1916, the Fenians played the part of martyred patriot-ghosts in much the same way as did Wolfe Tone and Smith O'Brien and other dead nationalists from 1798, 1848, 1867, and beyond. The Home Rule Party in Ireland, though it

³⁶⁰ *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 13, 1866.

³⁶¹ Brown, 41.

³⁶² Miller, 111.

lacked the martial vigor of earlier nationalists, still looked to these figures as inspiration for their cause.

In the end, it was not the Home Rule Party who brought Great Britain to the bargaining table after years of violence and agitation. It was Sinn Fein, who, after winning nearly every election in 1918 in Ireland's Catholic constituencies, refused to take their seats in a British Parliament. Uninterested in co-existing within a large British empire, Sinn Fein, like the Fenians and Young Irelanders before them, insisted on total Irish independence.

In December of 1921, after two years of guerilla warfare against Great Britain, a half-century after the Fenian revolts, seventy-three years since the debacle at Ballingarry, and a hundred twenty-three years following the violence at Wexford, such independence was won. The fighting was not entirely over, however, because the Irish still were not certain as to what, exactly, such a Republic was to look like, or where, precisely, its borders were to fall. Sinn Fein translates into "Ourselves alone." By 1921, Great Britain was finally ready to leave the "other" alone, and thus, the Irish "other" became the Irish Free State.

One should not conclude that the primary reason it took Irish nationalists so long to secure their independence was their inability to get along with each other. The British were numerically superior, possessed technological superiority, and used both advantages to create one of history's most successful war machines. One might just as easily analyze the reasons Great Britain relented to the nationalists so *soon*. However, factionalism *did* take its toll on Irish nationalist goals. Be it the religious animosity between Catholic and Protestant, the class struggle between landlord and peasant, the ideological differences between political parties, or merely the universal disagreements among personalities, for years the nationalists suffered for these divisions. Taking into account the modern day borders of the island and its violent 20th century history, it is reasonable to conclude that Ireland still suffers from this factionalism; that even today the specter of "the other" exists, always too close for comfort.

Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008)

Reviewed by Jason Miller

Jason Miller of Tolono, Illinois completed his Bachelor of Arts in history at the University of Illinois in December of 2007 where he was a member of Phi Kappa Phi. Currently, he is buried in research for his thesis project, a social history of political violence and the Copperhead movement in Illinois during the Civil War.

Divided into four parts, *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* offers new insights into Abraham Lincoln's life. Divided between Lincoln as President, as the Great Emancipator, as Family Man, and in Memory, these essays span from revisionist efforts to wholly new contributions to the historiography of Lincoln and the world in which he lived. Contributors include such household names as James McPherson and Eric Foner as well as names recognizable to specialists of the Civil War Era such as David Blight, Mark Neely Jr., Lincoln specialist Harold Holzer, and up and comer Manisha Sinha. Acting in his role as editor, Foner excels illustrating coherent themes that run through the volume while allowing each essay to stand on their own.

The first two sections of this compilation, "The President" and "Great Emancipator," contained some of the most interesting, illuminating, and convincing articles. Leading off part one is James M. McPherson's "A. Lincoln, Commander in Chief." Using an interdisciplinary approach of studying politics, strategy, and tactics to explore wartime Presidential leadership, McPherson seeks to fill the gap left by Lincoln's biographers—Lincoln's relationship with his armies. McPherson argues that Lincoln "took a more active, hands-on part in shaping military strategy than presidents have done in most other wars."³⁶³ Through his well known correspondence pushing McClellan to take the initiative in spring 1862 to other lesser known examples of Lincoln's prodding his generals, McPherson portrays Lincoln as actively espousing his own strategic outlook. The hesitancy of his generals troubled Lincoln, especially the commanders of the Army of the Potomac, until he finally found his kindred spirit in U.S. Grant in 1864. Anyone who may have heard McPherson speak over the past year will recognize this article and recall specific passages if not entire pages from his speaking engagements. If one were to buy this solely for McPherson's article they would be better advised to purchase his recently released book length exposition on this topic: *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief*.

Anyone interested in Lincoln and his questionable actions in relation to the Constitution during the war would benefit from Mark Neely Jr.'s article. Neely argues that while it is widely known that Lincoln was

³⁶³James McPherson, "A. Lincoln, Commander in Chief," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 28.

attempting to expand his Presidential powers through the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, what has remained unacknowledged is that Supreme Court Justice Taney's *Ex parte Merryman* decision was also an unconstitutional position aimed at increasing the Supreme Court's power. In his zeal Taney had not formulated his argument completely. His "overeager acceptance of the jurisdictional gift of Section 14 of the Judiciary Act of 1789" points to the "aggressive nature" of Taney's rulings and the willful expansion of his powers to protect Southern rights that began to turn reckless in his *Dred Scott* decision.³⁶⁴ Sean Wilentz's article portrays Lincoln as a Whig that "had always been more egalitarian than that of other Whigs" and had some Jacksonian tendencies. While an otherwise well argued article, Wilentz does not seem to take into account that Lincoln, as a western Whig, may have differed from eastern compatriots solely due to regional interests.

Part Two begins with an James Oakes' "Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights, and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race." Historians have long struggled with the issue of Lincoln's racial views. As Oakes points out "The evidence for Lincoln's views on the equality of blacks and whites is hopelessly contradictory. String together one set of quotations, and Lincoln comes off as a dyed-in-the-wool white supremacist. Compile a different body of evidence, and Lincoln reads like the purest of racial egalitarians."³⁶⁵ Oakes divides Lincoln's views into three levels: constitutional natural rights, privileges and immunities of citizenship, and race relations at the local level. Only this third division pertained to matters such as voting, jury duty, and marriage that, according to Oakes, Lincoln made "every concession" to "racial prejudice".³⁶⁶ Conversely, according to Oakes, Lincoln consistently upheld the natural rights and privileges and immunities of citizenship guaranteed to all citizens in the Constitution.

In "Lincoln and Colonization," Foner points out that most historians believe Lincoln adhered to Colonization of freed blacks for reasons of political pragmatism. According to this view, he did not want to alienate the less radical antislavery members of the Republican Party's antislavery coalition. He, therefore, held up the promise of exporting the "problem" of freedmen outside of the boundaries of the United States as a way to keep potential detractors within his ranks. For Foner, Lincoln was a true believer in colonization. He demonstrates that the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation contained references to colonization and that

³⁶⁴ Mark E. Neely, Jr., "The Constitution and Civil Liberties Under Lincoln," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 45.

³⁶⁵ James Oakes, "Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights, and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 109-110.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

Lincoln's embrace of colonization did not reconcile him to opponents of emancipation during the elections of 1862.³⁶⁷ Even on New Year's Eve 1862, the day before Emancipation Proclamation was to go into effect, Lincoln signed a contract with Bernard Kock to help settle freed blacks on Cow Island in the Caribbean and, even though he never spoke publicly of colonization after January 1 of 1863, Lincoln continued to look into schemes of colonization. For Foner, Lincoln's "long embrace of colonization suggests that recent historians may have been too quick to claim him as a supremely clever politician who secretly but steadfastly pursued the goal embodied in the Emancipation Proclamation or as a model of political pragmatism in contrast with the fanatical abolitionists. For what idea was more utopian and impractical than this fantastic scheme?"³⁶⁸ As Foner argues that, if Lincoln truly was a political pragmatist, he seriously misjudged the Border States' embrace of emancipation, the willingness of blacks to leave the country of their birth, and the "intractability of northern racism as an obstacle to ending slavery."³⁶⁹

Foner's provocative and convincing essay is followed by Manisha Sinha's equally provocative but less convincing "Allies for Emancipation?: Lincoln and Black Abolitionists." Like many historians, Sinha upholds the view that Lincoln's time in the Oval Office changed his perception of his role and the conflict's role in American history. Moving from a war of reunification to a war of emancipation, Lincoln came to see the conflict as part of a millennialist divine plan for the nation and the ending of slavery. Yet, from this basis she overstates the influence that black abolitionists, including Douglass, had upon the president. It is likely that black intellectual leaders of the abolitionist movement influenced Lincoln, but her argument does not show a causal link between their influence and Lincoln's views. In fact, if one was to accept the view of James Oakes's essay, Douglass and other black abolitionists were preaching to the choir. Her essay, like her book *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*, seems to garner its main force from the restatement of her thesis throughout the work. That, however, does not make it convincing.

Part Three of the compilation investigates Lincoln "The Man." This section begins with Andrew Delbanco's exploration of what meanings may have been lost and wrongly attached to Lincoln's words over past 140 years. It is an intriguing read for anyone concerned with the meaning of Lincoln's words in Lincoln's world. For this reader, most impressive within this section is Richard Carwardine's "Lincoln's Religion" which traces Lincoln's religious beliefs from his days as an "'infidel' politician of the 1830s" to an evangelical Protestant during his stint in the White House in

³⁶⁷ Eric Foner, "Lincoln and Colonization," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 159.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

which he looked for signs from God.³⁷⁰ In his early political days in Illinois, Lincoln was well aware that religion played a significant role in people's lives as well as their political motivations—different sects usually voted certain ways. Though Lincoln was an inconsistent attendee at Church, he garnered a reputation as an ethically earnest person that followed him from his early days and into the White House. Over the next four years, Lincoln would transform from that infidel of the 1830s into an intensely religious man and, finally, following his assassination, a Christian martyr.

Closing out Part III is Catherine Clinton's "Abraham Lincoln: The Family That Made Him, the Family He Made." As Clinton establishes that we still know very little about his family and those who shaped him, especially his mother. Her intervention, however, has very little to do with exploring and speculation on these unknowns. Instead, she offers the use of current scholarship on family honor in southern households to explore Lincoln's "complex personal character."³⁷¹ Her exploration holds promise, but relies heavily on theories of cause and effect especially in regards to Lincoln's relationship with his mother and his treatment of women throughout his life.³⁷²

The book closes with an article in the vein of recent scholarship exploring the memory of the war and its appropriation. David Blight's "The Theft of Lincoln in Scholarship, Politics, and Public Memory" should serve as the beginnings of new facets directed towards understanding the memory of the war and its leaders in modern society. For Blight the Lincoln myth is just as tenacious as that of the Lost Cause, but maybe a bit more malleable. As he points out, the Republican National Committee recently has been reminding the electorate that it "is" the "Party of Lincoln." Such claims, Blight points, misrepresent Lincoln's character and the Republican Party's beliefs of the time period that serve to create a direct, albeit fictitious, tie with the Republican Party of today.³⁷³ Other examples abound, Blight's work is an important reminder that it was not just the losers of the Civil War that created myths.

The strength of this compilation is its holistic approach towards Lincoln. While there are no direct disagreements between scholars within the volume, one can draw distinctions between the different approaches, interpretations, and uses of sources in the volume. Despite some shortcomings, this volume is a worthy edition to any Civil War scholar's

³⁷⁰ Richard Carwardine, "Lincoln's Religion," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 248, 232.

³⁷¹ Catherine Clinton, "Abraham Lincoln: the Family That Made Him, the Family He Made," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 251.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁷³ David W. Blight, "The Theft of Lincoln in Scholarship, Politics, and Public Memory," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspective on Lincoln and His World*, Eric Foner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 270-275.

library and has the potential to reopen some old and create some new debates.