

The Historical Connection Between African Americans and Irish Catholics:
An Analysis of Cross-Cultural Grief through Negro Spirituals, Irish Ballads and Narratives
Produced During Subjugation

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Advisors: Dr. William Rogers, Dr. Robert Butts, and Dr. Christina McGrath

Lance L. Lee
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey
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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Abstract..... | 3 |
| Dedication..... | 4 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 6 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 8 |
| Chapter 2: Connections That Formed Through Servitude..... | 18 |
| Chapter 3: Trans-Atlantic Bond Between Black Abolitionists and the Anti-Slavery Movement in Ireland..... | 35 |
| Chapter 4: Abolitionists Near and Abroad..... | 47 |
| Chapter 5: From Nationalism to Liberation..... | 66 |
| Chapter 6: Narratives of Grief and Misery..... | 79 |
| Chapter 7: Singing from the Grave: Identifying Grief and Misery in Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads..... | 92 |
| Chapter 8: Significance of Preserving Famine Ballads and Spirituals in Folk Music..... | 122 |
| Chapter 9: Conclusion..... | 136 |
| Bibliography..... | 142 |

Abstract

The historical bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics, viewed through a micro-historical lens, offers a new perspective that enhances understanding of their centuries-old connection and its role in shaping American society. This dissertation highlights the physical, emotional, and spiritual links between African Americans and Irish Catholics in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first section of the dissertation addresses the engagement between Blacks and Irish immigrants in Northern industrial cities, where relationships—both civil and tense—led to the assimilation of Irish and WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) cultures. At the same time, the social class of African Americans remained deprived and stagnant. Highlighting these moments of cooperation and shared struggle can inspire the audience to appreciate the resilience and solidarity that characterized these interactions. This section also draws significant attention to the transatlantic bonds that formed between Black Abolitionists and Irish advocates for emancipation by examining the financial and social support they received as they traveled the Emerald Isle seeking aid from the Irish people.

The second section explores the spiritual connection by examining the similarities between Famine Ballads and Negro Spirituals, both produced amid the calamity of servitude and degradation initiated by the British and American governments. Through the voices and wailings of Famine victims and those enslaved, the paper analyzes the similarities in emotional grief and sorrow between Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads, providing a basis for extensive comparative studies in folk songs to supplement empathy among isolated civilizations.

Dedication

Dedications are traditionally meant for people or entities. If it had not been for them, the achievements would not have been possible. The absence of three specific entities would make this moment impossible: the Creator(s) that bind us together, my ancestors and Dr. Clement Alexander Price.

It is extraordinary how traditional customs have persisted in African American culture for generations. Even though many African Americans claim either Christianity or Islam as their religion of choice, many West African traditional customs continue to inspire and shape the current spiritual landscape. “He has an Old Soul” is one such Indigenous concept acknowledged in many African-American homes as a representation of the reincarnation of a familial ancestor in the birth of a child, in which the child’s demeanor and mannerisms closely resemble those of a great-grandparent who has transcended. Many spiritual traditions and interpretations of a Creator or “Great Spirit,” as in Indigenous American customs, share universal features, such as the belief that the Creator(s) is omnipresent in all entities, including humans, animals, planets, and stars. While respecting the traditions and beliefs of modern mono and polytheistic beliefs, I find it natural to accept traditional representations of a Creator as being a force that connects all entities universally. Scientifically, many of the same minerals and elements in humans are present in nearly every entity in the universe; therefore, my first dedication is reserved for the Creator(s) or “Great Spirit(s)” that universally binds us all together.

Throughout my life, I have often been regaled by my grandmother’s recollections of life in the South. She and my grandfather migrated to Newark, New Jersey, from Wilson, North Carolina, when her children were young. My maternal grandmother's grandparents were born in

bondage. We would not be here if it were not for our ancestors—mine, who have endured the middle passage, bondage, rape, removal, and humiliation in one of the greatest calamities of American history.. I wonder if readers might question how these hardships shape my perspective; understanding this history deepens appreciation for resilience. There are kin that I will never meet because their ancestors died in the coffin ships of the middle passage or perished under the monstrosities of subjugation; somehow my ancestors were able to find a will, albeit spiritual or religious, to survive.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the late Dr. Clement Alexander Price, Rutgers historian and former chair of Urban Studies at Rutgers Newark. You challenged your African American History class in 2003 to write a paper on Negro Spirituals, a topic I was unfamiliar with at the time. That project led me to experience the voices of Marian Anderson, Mahalia Jackson, Paul Robeson, and many others who would ultimately change the trajectory of my life. I developed a pride in my Black heritage that had been missing before your class. I hope readers understand that your mentorship profoundly influenced my academic and personal growth, inspiring this work. That paper stimulated the focus of this dissertation and my lifelong research on folk songs and building empathy through music. The transformative power of this journey is evident in the person I have become. Knowing that I was able to embrace you with a hug several months before your untimely passing is still surreal, and you will be forever missed. Thank you, and God Bless.

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Acknowledgements are traditionally for those who have assisted you along the journey, whose help was a critical factor in the outcome. Many advisors, teachers, family members, and the dissertation committee have guided me along this personal and academic journey and made this process pleasant and enlightening. My wife and children have inspired me through this doctoral journey; they have endured the Monday evenings without me at home while I attended classes at Drew University for several years. Dr. Bill Rogers, whose class on the Irish Potato Famine (An Gorta Mor) and Irish history, introduced me to the suffering of the Irish People, highlighting the similarities between Irish and Black subjugation. Author and professor Dr. Christine Kinealy's extensive research on the Famine, and on Irish and Black relations served as a crucial foundation for my dissertation research. Dr. Robert Butts, whose class is beyond the canon of classical music, encouraged me to research the African American contributions to music in America and beyond. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Christina McGrath, whose literary expertise provided the proper components to make this dissertation strong.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Johnathan Golden, whose classes on conflict resolution encouraged me to reflect on and address my internal biases which had previously been a barrier to researching the connection between Irish and African Americans. My eighth-grade teacher, Mrs. Rowley, noticed my writing and complimented it, which motivated me to continue developing my skills. High school teacher Mrs. Canady encouraged me to question and research prior historical interpretations of colonial and indigenous relations, inspiring curiosity. Dr. Ralph B. Terrell provided sources from his father's library on spirituals and the foundation of Negro

music in America, enriching my understanding. Dr. Zain Abdullah, a history teacher at Rutgers, recommended Drew University to me, opening new academic pathways. Dr. Leslie Sprout, whose dissertation advice led me to delve deeper into the understanding of folk music and the ethnomusicological foundations of Famine Ballads and Negro Spirituals, helped me grow academically. Dr. Liana Piehler helped me develop an appropriate title for this dissertation that represented my research's historical and musical components. I want to acknowledge Dr. Tamara Freeman, whose research and dissertation on the music composed by children in the Holocaust inspired me. My parents encouraged me to read books and write essays outside of school assignments, fostering my love for learning, and my siblings always showed me love and respect, even in disagreements, which strengthened my personal resilience.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole” ~ Malcolm X¹

The Historical Connection between African Americans and Irish Catholics with an Analysis of Cross-Cultural Grief introduces the reader to the historical actions of the British and American governments, which led to the subjugation of African Americans and Irish Catholics and the physical and emotional connections between the two groups as they relate to grief and misery during their parallel struggles for liberation. The dissertation examines the physical connection between enslaved and free people and their affiliation with Irish immigrants in the 19th century; it also details the substantial contributions of Irish Abolitionists, both men and women, towards emancipation.

This study also focuses on the cross-cultural connections between African Americans and Irish Catholics in the United States and Ireland as both groups move from servitude to liberation, emphasizing the shared grief and misery that evoke empathy in the audience experienced by enslaved negroes and tenant farmers in the 19th century. It highlights the agony that accompanies family separation through death, theft, and forced emigration by a comparative analysis of songs and narratives produced by the victims of slavery and the Great Irish Potato Famine, or An Gorta Mor (the Great Hunger).

There is considerable research highlighting the bond between African Americans and Irish immigrants in America; from Noel Ignatiev's How the Irish Became White to Peter Quinn's Banished Children of Eve, this connection has been extensively examined. However, the

¹ X, M., Haley, A., Shabazz, A., Handler, M. S., & Davis, O. (1999). *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. Ballantine Books, 373.

theoretical approaches have shifted slightly from David Roediger's attribution of the term, "Whiteness theory" in his book The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class to highlight Noel Ignatiev's theory that Irish immigrants had to distance themselves socially from Negroes to advance their social class in the American diaspora in his book How the Irish Became White. Other scholars such as Christine Samito point out that although Irish immigrants were of a "lower" class when compared to White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the 19th century and were treated harshly, they shared many of the privileges allotted to WASPs that were not afforded to Blacks, such as the right to form militia, vote, and bear arms thus making them in a class above Blacks.^{2,3} A portion of this dissertation emphasizes how the laws of American colonies (later U.S. states) instituted laws to restrict further the upward mobility of Blacks and how both races found themselves socially ostracized for much of the 1800s, leading to the fraternization of Irish and African Americans.

Christine Kinealy has made enormous contributions in documenting the bonds between African American and Irish abolitionists. Her books and essays guided my approach to emphasizing this under-documented connection with respect to antislavery efforts. While reaffirming the bond between African American Abolitionists and sympathizers in Ireland, the research aims to highlight the Irish Abolitionist associations and to draw attention to the

² The description Black and African American are used throughout the study; however, they have distinct meanings. This thesis involves the historical bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics and the cross-cultural influence. African Americans is a noun used to represent the ethnic identity of African descendants in America; whereas, Black is a nationality representing the African diaspora of Africans and their descendants around the world. Therefore, the noun African American will be used to refer to African Americans, i.e., African descendants born in America, whereas the noun Black will be used to represent the African diaspora nationwide.

³ Durnas, H. (2025, October 21). "*Black/african american*" - *black cultural erasure in genetic counseling*. nsgc.
<https://perspectives.nsgc.org/Article/blackafrican-american-black-cultural-erasure-in-genetic-counseling>

under-represented role of Irish female Abolitionists, who were just as instrumental as the male associations in highlighting the tragic nature of chattel slavery in the quest for emancipation.

The connection and solidarity between the Black and Irish nationalists of the 20th century are also addressed in the dissertation. The historical attention on this period certainly could be more voluminous. Building on the cross-cultural interactions between Marcus Garvey and Eamon de Valera, Angela Davis and Bernadette McAliskey, and reciprocal influences of the Black and Irish Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, this dissertation can demonstrate a suitable foundation for the spiritual “I’ll Be Alright” as an anthem in both movements, encouraging cross-cultural understanding and shared purpose.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' research and publications on the stages of grief in her book: On Grief & Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss, primarily address individual and family responses after a traumatic shock. This dissertation emphasizes the significance of prolonged and transgenerational grief, especially in contexts of ongoing trauma such as slavery and famine; both traumatic experiences continually disrupt the process outlined by Ross and lead to persistent, transgenerational suffering as described by Deborah Peck in her dissertation Silent Hunger: The Psychological Impact of the Great Irish Hunger: An Gorta Mor (1845-1852).

Music has been used as a mechanism for grieving and mourning for centuries. From ancient Greece to the Aztec civilization, music and musical rituals have accompanied funerals, mourning rituals, and war.⁴ While drawing a connection to the historical significance of musical expression utilized as a resource for comfort during troubled times, the research highlights the spiritual and emotional connection between enslaved African Americans and Irish tenant farmers

⁴ Steen, A. (2024, August 17). *What is music? - definition, history, types, and benefits*. Prime Sound. <https://primesound.org/what-is-music/>

during the 19th century by examining the narratives, spirituals, ballads, and musical expressions produced by the victims of slavery and oppression.

Historians, artists, and musicians have highlighted the similarities of grief and misery endured by victims of slavery and the Potato Famine, and thorough analyses have been conducted; however, I have found little documentation upon which critical analysis is given highlighting the similarities between Famine Ballads and Negro Spirituals that emphasizes the presence of grief created through the traumatizing acts of child separation via death, theft, and force; this is a theme in the Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads chosen for my analysis.

Researchers usually have two fundamental tasks: obtaining information that is not readily available to the broader population and repackaging forgotten information to appeal to the population. Just as a singer or director remakes a song or movie to appeal to a younger audience, one can package passion for Black and Irish history in a way that fosters empathy for unfamiliar struggles.

I first began discussing the topic of Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads ten years ago at the NJEA teachers' convention held in Atlantic City. The reception of tears, wonder, and amazement made me realize how little is known about such topics, as well as about the Black and Irish bond in America; furthering my research, I became aware of how little I even knew. Two years ago, a teacher approached me at the convention and said she had attended my presentation on Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads years before. She relayed the songs to her elementary students, who were also compassionately overwhelmed; that was when I understood my purpose. What began as a heartfelt discussion and introduction to the Irish and Black diaspora through the analysis of Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads transformed into an objective to highlight the historical parallels between chattel slavery and the plights of other

cultures that have experienced oppression and subjugation, through the analysis of both texts and musical components. This research is significant because, in addition to highlighting the underrepresented bond that historically exists between African Americans and Irish American Catholics, it also analyzes the vocalization of traumatic grief, which was present in Negro Spirituals and Irish Famine Ballads. The comprehensive comparative analysis provides the following:

- A blueprint on how to use music and poetry to highlight the similarities of cross-cultural grief.
- Building cross-cultural empathy between African Americans and Irish Americans by utilizing many grief songs to emphasize the similar struggles that exist communally across cultures.

To encourage the reader to conceptualize the atmosphere in the U.S. where African Americans and Irish worked and congregated, the thesis provides an exposition highlighting the laws and social opposition that restricted both Blacks and Irish in the 1800s, and the zeitgeist that contributed to the housing and working dogma conducive to the amalgamation that took place. The Abolitionist movement by Black and white Americans led to connections and assistance from Quaker, Protestant, and Catholic communities in Ireland.

This study relies on the narratives and letters of enslaved people, tenant farmers, and Irish emigrants such as Catherine Hennigan and Harriet Jacobs; their words detail the hardships of famine and chattel slavery and speak to the destitute circumstances millions encountered in servitude. An analysis is drawn detailing the obstructions of child separation, not simply as a literary component but as a musical component.

The Ballads and Spirituals complement the narratives, highlighting the misery and grief of slavery and famine. This study conducts a detailed analysis of six Negro Spirituals and four Famine Ballads. Two of the spirituals, “I’ll Be Alright,” a precursor to “We Shall Overcome,” and “Soon I Will Be Done” (also known as “Trouble of the World”), demonstrate the enduring nature of harmony, as their lyrics and musical elements maintain generational relevance. These pieces triangulate the message of liberty for both African Americans and Irish Catholics during their respective Civil Rights eras in America and Ireland. In addition, the spiritual “Soon I Will Be Done” emphasizes the shared struggles of Black Americans and Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, as illustrated by the voices of Sinéad O’Connor and Mahalia Jackson. Although the two versions of “Soon I Will Be Done” were performed nearly 60 years apart, its resilience over time is evident in O’Connor’s rendition, which draws parallels to the era and struggles of her own context. The remaining six pieces consist of a thorough analysis of three spirituals: “Many Thousands Gone,” “Motherless Child,” and “Oh Lord, How Come Me Here,” along with three Famine Ballads: “Skibbereen,” “Kilkelly,” and “Praties They Grow Old.” The analysis explores their emotional components while identifying similarities in tone, lyrics, and messages across both the spirituals and the ballads.

This thesis blends both historical and fine arts disciplines by encouraging the reader to navigate the historical confines of cultural genocide through the words of famine and chattel slavery victims. By highlighting the grief and misery that accompany the struggles endured by victims of slavery and famine, this dissertation aims to elicit empathetic emotions through the analysis of the music and ballads produced by these victims.

Chapter 2 provides an expository component to America's Black and Irish experience. It highlights the commonwealth laws of Virginia and Massachusetts, which delineated the

Negro^{5,6,7} from an indentured servant, who was available to own land as well as indentured servants, and to enjoy the benefits afforded to white individuals, into a lifelong property class. The chapter also discusses the Penal Laws, Orange Wars, and Potato Famines as direct factors for the Irish emigration in the 1800s and the social conditions that brought these groups to populate the largest cities in the United States. The primary sources for this chapter include commonwealth documents of indentured servitude laws and slave codes and state census data detailing the population of Black and Irish citizens in the mid-19th century. Secondary/Tertiary resources include books by Ignatiev, Sean O'Callaghan, Kinealy, Peter Quinn, and others, which provide historical accounts of periods in Ireland and the United States that contributed to the bond and strife among Irish and Black people in the industrial North.

Chapter 3 highlights the transatlantic bond between African American Abolitionists and Ireland. It details the plight of several prominent African American Abolitionists' travels to

⁵ Although the word “Negro” is relatively archaic, the usage of the noun in this thesis is to reference not just a people but an era between the 19th to the mid-20th century. The word was commonly used to refer to people of African descent. The term Negro comes from the Spanish and Portuguese words meaning "Dark" or "Black." Deriving from the Latin word 'Nīger'. For more than 100 years, there has been significant debate among black scholars over the usage of the words 'Black' African American, and Negro, to represent black people. W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey felt that the term Negro was appropriate, codified to define resilience and strength; however, its use was met with equal fatigue and resistance from figures such as Elijah Muhammad and Booker T. Washington. Nevertheless, many prominent scholars frequently used the word in their writings and speeches, including MLK and James Baldwin. I use the term to refer to Black people before the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 60s, when it began to fade and lose favor with many prominent liberation leaders like Huey P. Newton and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael).

⁶ Bennett, L., Barton, R. A., & Du Bois, W. E. B. (1969). WHAT’S IN A NAME? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 26(4), 399–412. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42574587>

⁷ Sigelman, L., Tuch, S. A., & Martin, J. K. (2005). What’s in a Name? Preference for “Black” versus “African-American” among Americans of African Descent. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(3), 429–438. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3521549>

Ireland to promote their narratives and speeches, as well as to elicit empathy towards emancipation. Primary sources include narratives and speeches from Frederick Douglass, Oluadah Equiano, and Sara P. Remond. Secondary resources include Christine Kinealy's Black Abolitionists in Ireland, as well as journal and scholarly articles attesting to the prominent Black presence in Ireland in establishing Trans-Atlantic bonds and supporting emancipation.

Chapter 4 highlights the Irish Abolitionists who were instrumental in the success of Black Abolitionists during their visits to the Emerald Isle. Highlighting the roles of Daniel O'Connell, the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society, and others, while emphasizing the pivotal roles Irish women like Mary Ann McCracken and the members of the Female Anti-Slavery Societies played in financially supporting African Americans and in advancing emancipation. Primary sources include the letters of Irish and American Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison (Wm. Lloyd Garrison was his preferred signage)⁸ and Richard Webb alongside Daniel O'Connell's speeches, pamphlets, and bylaws printed and distributed by Anti-Slavery Societies. Secondary resources include articles, journals, and scholarly publications by Kinealy, William Rogers, and others that analyze exchanges among Abolitionists while addressing their differences in social and political perspectives.

Chapter 5 underscores the postbellum connections between African Americans and Irish Nationalists by exploring the solidarity formed between Nationalists and Civil Rights leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Recognizing the solidarity between Marcus Garvey and Eamon de Valera, and between the Black and Irish Civil Rights struggles, this text establishes a connection in which communication influenced both movements in their struggles for sovereignty and liberation. Primary sources for this chapter include articles, letters, and books written by key

⁸ Garrison, W. (n.d.). Signature of William Lloyd Garrison [Correspondence]. Retrieved from <https://omeka-s.noblenet.org/s/winthrop/item/21074>

figures in the Nationalist and Civil Rights movements, both Irish and American. Secondary sources include books by Christine Kinealy, Brian Dooley, and other authors who have documented the events during the Civil Rights era and the Troubles in Ireland in the latter half of the 20th century.

Chapter 6 introduces the reader to the grief experience by walking through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's identification of the stages of traumatic grief in her book On Grief & Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss and highlighting the principles of long-term grief and misery as they pertain to Slavery and the Great Irish Potato Famine. The commonalities of grief and suffering related to child death and family separation during these periods are emphasized through the analyses of Negro Narratives and letters written by both famine victims and survivors. Primary sources include narratives from John Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, Catherine Hennigan, and Hannah Curtis. Secondary resources include Susan Bartoletti's Black Potatoes, John Kelly's The Graves Are Walking, and other works that provide vivid oral accounts of the horrors endured by Irish Catholics during the Potato Famine.

Chapter 7 builds on its previous chapter's introduction to grief and analysis of grief through narratives and letters of famine and enslaved people by providing a historiography of Negro Spirituals and Irish Folklore and demonstrating how subjugation and oppression birthed the harmonic vocalization of suffering and misery through music and ballads. Following the exposition of the history of music as a mechanism for mourning, the chapter expands upon the agony of losing a child to death or separation during servitude and subjugation by further analyzing the narratives of its victims and highlighting literary and musical expressions of grief. The section also analyzes several Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads, which provide a lyrical

component while acting as a subsidiary to the textualized misery outlined in Narratives. Primary sources include musicologists such as John and Alan Lomax, William Allen, James W. Johnson and others whose recordings and documenting of Negro Spirituals, ballads, and field songs intersect with the preservation of folk songs, adding to its authenticity.

This chapter includes visual and auditory performances from artists like Marian Anderson's rendition of "Motherless Child," Kyaunne Richardson's "Lord, How Come Me Here?" and Don Stiffe's rendition of "Skibbereen." These performances add to the depth of emotion undertaken by the original performers of these Ballads and Spirituals during subjugation. The links to John Lomax's recordings of "Oh Freedom" and "Motherless Child" gives the listener an audio recording of distressed women held in southern penitentiaries during the Jim Crow era—less than two generations removed from chattel slavery—where the former Confederate States sought to re-enslave Negroes for fabricated or minimal offenses on the penal plantations where their grandparents possibly were enslaved.

Finally, Chapter 8, which precedes the dissertation's concluding chapter, focuses on the survival of Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads through folk music. The chapter underscores the importance of folk music in preserving and proliferating spirituals and ballads by analyzing the significance of the Spiritual "No More Auction Block" and the Famine Ballad "Praties They Grow Small." Drawing on the research of folk musicians and ethnomusicologists such as Alan Lomax and Érick Falc'her-Poyroux, there will also be an emphasis on how folk music can foster empathy and social awareness while preserving the lyrical DNA of the historical context in which the song is rooted.

Chapter 2: Connections That Formed Through Servitude

“In no sound philosophy can slavery be justified. ‘Tis at war with the best feelings of the human heart. ‘Tis at war with Christianity. Wherever we find an individual justify[ing] slavery on such a pretext you will find him also justifying the slavery of any human beings on the earth. ‘Tis the old argument on the part of tyrants.” ~ Frederick Douglass⁹

I am fortunate to have learned about history from the African American perspective in school. With the recent book bans and anti-DEI (Diversity Equity Inclusion) curriculum agendas that have plagued many districts across the United States in the 2020s¹⁰, it’s inconceivable to imagine a civics curriculum absent the perspective of the immigrants, enslaved persons, and Indigenous people whose contributions were vital to the growth and development of this country. However, constraints in education are partly due to curriculum and state examination guidelines, which dictate the content taught, and partly due to teachers’ lack of knowledge of a specific topic. But even the knowledge I acquired in my youth about African American History is minuscule compared to the depth of information later encountered during my graduate studies at Drew University. I was once under the impression that enslaved persons had only the assistance of Abolitionists to advocate for emancipation, and that the only relationship that existed between Blacks and Irish immigrants was a tumultuous one because of incidents like Tammy Hall and the Draft Riots. But those notions are debunked in this chapter, where the expositional narrative chronicles the history of Black and Irish people in the U.S. from servitude to the Civil War. It

⁹ IrishCentralStaff (Ed.). (2025, October 27). *On this day: Frederick Douglass’s powerful Cork speech denouncing racism was published in the cork examiner*. IrishCentral.com. <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/frederick-douglass-cork-speech>

¹⁰ *Anti Dei issue*. Center for Urban and Racial Equity. (2025, March 6). <https://urbanandracialequity.org/anti-dei-issue/>

gives a concrete foundation of the causes that led the two groups, once ostracized by the country, to develop a bond laden with ambiguity and camaraderie.

It is essential to understand the History of Black and Irish bondage in the Americas under Colonial Rule. Oliver Cromwell transported thousands of Irish citizens to the Caribbean and the American colonies after years of conflict between Britain and Ireland, known as the Orange Wars.¹¹ Cromwell's occupation forced the emigration of many Irish—both Catholic and Protestant—to the New World as indentured servants.¹² There has been considerable debate about whether the Irish were ever enslaved. That argument is left to perspective, which is why I use the umbrella term of “bondage” which encompasses every form of subjugation, whether indentured or chattel (or even some situation in between the two), to describe servitude.

Background: The Black Experience

The first Africans used as cargo arrived in the North American colonies in 1619 after they were taken from the West African territory presently known as Angola aboard the Spanish slave ship *Sao Joao Bautista*. The *Bautista*, while heading to the Spanish colonies in South America, was intercepted by American privateers (pirates for hire) and brought to the Virginia colony aboard the *White Lion*.¹³ Twenty captives from the West African nation of Angola were taken from the *Bautista* and redirected to the colony of Virginia as indentured servants that day.¹⁴

¹¹ O'Callaghan, S. (2001). *To hell or Barbados: The ethnic cleansing of Ireland*. Brandon.

¹² Donoghue, J. (2017). The Curse of Cromwell: revisiting the Irish slavery debate. *History Ireland*, 25(4), 24–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90014565>

¹³ National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). *Dred scott v. Sandford (1857)*. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dred-scott-v-sandford>

¹⁴ Onion, A., Sullivan, M., Mullen, M., & Zapata, C. (Eds.). (2019, August 13). *First enslaved Africans arrive in Jamestown, setting the stage for slavery in North America | August 20, 1619*. History.com. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-african-slave-ship-arrives-jamestown-colony>

Before the mid-17th century, African Americans and Irish people were indentured servants in America, utilizing the same living and working spaces. Early Virginia elites recognized a disadvantage of race integration that led to work strikes, biracial families, and race intermingling in the mid-1600s. In response, the Virginia legislature set forth a series of laws that served the purpose of excluding Africans and descendants of African people from sharing the rights previously afforded, such as land ownership, voting rights, short-term indentured servitude, and paternal birth rights, which precluded Blacks from lifelong slavery, thus beginning the chattel slave system in America (See table 2.1). Paul Finkelman does an extraordinary job chronicling “Slave Laws” in America in his 2012 dissertation on Slavery in the United States.¹⁵

The legalized slave codes forced on African Americans did little to make the intermingling of Blacks and whites, as well as the Irish, extinct; however, as indentured Irishmen completed their terms of service and raised themselves as landowners and, some, enslavers, the mixing of races continued, just in a different dynamic; it became more of a master-servant relationship.¹⁶

Understanding the Black experience in America, from indentured to chattel slavery, is a critical component when discussing the bond between African Americans and Irish immigrants in America for several reasons. This section is significant because it provides a partial blueprint of the American class system that laid the foundation for African American subjugation. It is important to understand racism and classism as arbitrary systems created as a means of pacifying a majority of white Americans by having them feel socially superior to one race; this makes a perfect distraction for elites to hoard wealth by distracting the masses. Recognizing these

¹⁵ Finkelman, P. (2012). *Slavery in the United States: Persons or property?* (dissertation). *Slavery in the United States: Persons or Property?* Oxford University Press, Oxford etc.

¹⁶ Feinstein, R. A. (2019a). *When rape was legal: The untold history of sexual violence during slavery*. Routledge.

systems can inspire the audience to question and challenge social inequalities, fostering a sense of agency and hope for change.

Recognizing how Irish immigrants interacted with both enslaved and free Black populations in urban areas helps the audience feel connected to a shared history that continues to influence social dynamics today. These reasons, in particular, help us understand how it was that Irish immigrants came in contact with both enslaved and "freemen" in large urban areas. Dr. Francis M. Johnson documents the quantity of reported biracial families in Philadelphia and Baltimore in the mid-19th century but notes that "while there may not have been legal proscriptions against interracial families, negative social views of both Blacks and whites help explain the small number of cases in the city."¹⁷

Background: The Irish Experience:

In April 2019, actor James Woods shared an image on social media of white children in a condition of poverty, with the added caption "White slaves." Woods' post was an attempt to highlight the disparity in recognition given to "White slaves" from Europe in the 1600s. During this same period, African Americans were garnering attention through Black Lives Matter, Juneteenth celebrations, and the publication of the book *1619* (see figure 2.1). The feeble attempt by the once "famous" actor highlighted something more sinister than the incongruent details of the facts. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and this principle applies to historical events as well as to physics. Revisionism is the misrepresentation of historical events some deem offensive, or the emphasis on the negative actions of a particular group of people (mainly the

¹⁷ Johnson, M. F. (2023). *"mingled together": Irish and African American relations in Civil War-era Philadelphia and Baltimore* (dissertation). *"Mingled Together": Irish and African American Relations in Civil War-Era Philadelphia and Baltimore*. The George Washington University.

dominant group), altering the facts to support a narrative that is not true. Therefore, there has been considerable debate about the Irish origins in the American Colonies by certain members of white society in an attempt to minimize the role of chattel slavery as being strictly reserved for Blacks.¹⁸ Bondage, however, does encompass many forms of servitude. This dissertation will specifically address the differences between chattel slavery and indentured servitude, which applied to many Irish immigrants who emigrated from the Emerald Isle between the 17th and 18th centuries.

The first wave of Irish immigrants was mainly Protestant (or single Catholic men who abandoned the religion as it was proscribed in many of the colonies) and emigrated to the American colonies in the 1600s, many as indentured servants. The death of Elizabeth I in 1603 brought an end to several decades of religious conflict over the spiritual rule of Ireland, Scotland, and Britain.¹⁹ This religious strife created tension in Ireland for Catholics and Protestant members of the Anglican Church for many years. Catholics, who were the majority, gained temporary authority in the mid-1600s after decades of religious turmoil. However, this rule was short-lived, as the English Parliament regained control and imposed Penal Laws²⁰ on Irish Catholics that forbade land ownership and the restructuring of the agricultural system, as well as many other limitations on Irish Catholics.²¹ In addition to the outbreak of diseases, plagues, and various bouts of famine, more than one-third of Irish Catholics emigrated to America (and other nations) in the 19th century due to the horrendous treatment under British occupation.²²

¹⁸ Smith, R. S. (2025, August 2). *How slavery became the law of the land “for blacks only.”* America’s Black Holocaust Museum.

¹⁹ Ó Siochrú, M. (2009). *God’s executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the conquest of Ireland*. Faber.

²⁰ Kinealy, C. (1997). *A death-dealing famine: The great hunger in Ireland*. Pluto Press.

²¹ *Irish penal law - statutes in chronological order*. Statutes in Chronological Order - THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE| Irish Penal Laws. (n.d.). <https://librarycollections.law.umn.edu/irishlaws/chron-anne.html>

²² Kinealy, C. (1997). *A death-dealing famine: The great hunger in Ireland*. Pluto Press.

Learning takes place when knowledge is acquired through education or life experiences. Throughout one's life, individuals encounter many opportunities to acquire knowledge through diverse means and experiences. This section is significant because the learning I gained came from dispelling misconceptions I had about slavery and Irish immigrants. Several misconceptions must be challenged to appreciate and understand the significant bond between African Americans and Irish people in America. The concept that Blacks were enslaved and therefore couldn't have come in contact with Irish immigrants, as well as the idea that Blackness and whiteness were established based on actual physical characteristics and not as a form of social classification, must both be challenged. These two misconceptions, which I carried since elementary school, thwarted my attempt to uncover a formative narrative of African Americans for many years.

Even though the *Dred Scott* decision established Negroes as property and, thus, they would never have the same rights as a person categorically deemed as white, not every Black person was held in bondage. Statista.com notes that in the year before the Civil War, the census reported that the U.S. had 4.4 million Black or African Americans, 4 million of whom were held in bondage in Confederate states. Nearly 400 thousand, or 9% of the African American population, were not bonded (table 2.2).²³ The word "freeman" is placed in quotations in this dissertation while referring to unbonded Negroes before the proclamation of the 13th Amendment, noting that even though Blacks were not in bondage, most times they were still considered property and technically unfree.²⁴ According to the 1860 census retrieved through

²³ O'Neill, A. (2024, August 12). *United States: Black and slave population 1790-1880*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1010169/black-and-slave-population-us-1790-1880/>

²⁴ Judgment in the U.S. Supreme Court Case *Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford*; 3/6/1857; *Dred Scott, Plaintiff in Error, v. John F. A. Sandford*; Appellate Jurisdiction Case Files, 1792 -

National Archives, the border state of Maryland contained the largest population of “freemen” before the Civil War.²⁵ Yet, the probability of being kidnapped and sold into slavery was still a reality as it was in Southern states. However, the rights of “freemen” in the North were still limited, especially as they pertained to occupation and dwelling. Many Negroes were reduced to living in cramped quarters under abject conditions in undesirable crowded urban cities, several of the largest industrial cities in the 19th century, such as Manhattan, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston. It would be in these neglected industrial cities where Blacks and many immigrants, most of whom were Irish, lived, labored, and gathered, often developing both tensions and amalgamation.

These cities saw growth in trade and manufacturing, attracting the migration of “free” Blacks and immigrants seeking employment and housing, making it possible to rent rooms or apartments. In contrast, rural areas had limited employment opportunities and housing availability. Between 1800 and 1930, America saw an influx of nearly 4.5 million Irish immigrants, with the largest concentration of Irish Catholics arriving on the East Coast in the 1850s, as Ireland experienced the Great Potato Famine (An Gorta Mor).²⁶

Irish immigrants, who were overwhelmingly Catholic during the 1800s, would face unprecedented obstacles similar to those faced by African Americans in the U.S. Social ostracism due to religion, similar to the exclusion faced in Ireland due to British/Protestant rule, and impoverished conditions would be the harsh realities upon which both Blacks and Irish would establish bonds in these major cities. The WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants)

2010; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, Record Group 267; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

²⁵ National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.-a). *1860 census records*. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1860>

²⁶ *Ancestry® family history learning hub*. U.S. Immigration in the 1800s | Ancestry® Family History Learning Hub. (n.d.).

establishment socially ostracized Irish Catholics who emigrated to America in the 19th century; they were regarded as just one step above the Negro in the social hierarchy construct of society, and commonly referred to as “Black.”²⁷ Irish immigrants were socially excluded from many workplaces, political positions, and social organizations, similar to African Americans. Still, the absence of laws preventing their citizenship (*Scott vs. Sanford*, 1857) or laws restricting Irish Catholics from organizing militia units was a crucial factor that ultimately enabled the Irish community to achieve upward social mobility.²⁸ Figure 2.2 is an illustration depicting the stereotypical views of Irishmen and Black individuals in the 19th century..²⁹

The large industrial port cities not only fueled job and housing competition, which brought about strife, but also fostered amalgamation, or race mixing. Central Park was established in the location where Seneca Village once stood; its predominant African American community was also the home to mixed-race marriages of Black and Irish couples.³⁰ Irish and Black mixing occurs routinely in the historical Five Points district of Manhattan, so much so that it became a tourist attraction for the upper class to view what was deemed as destitute slums filled with race mixing and prostitution:

Originally the site of New York City’s first free black settlement, by 1850, the Five Points district in lower Manhattan had instead become infamous for its dance halls, bars, gambling houses, prostitution, and for its mixed-race clientele. To the larger white community, the Five Points was both a warning about the dangers of racial mixing and a threat to New York’s racial and social order. To white missionaries and reformers, the area was a mission field.

²⁷ Roediger, D. R. (2018). *Working toward whiteness: How America’s immigrants became white: The strange journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. Basic Books.

²⁸ Ignatiev, N. (2015). *How the Irish became white*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

²⁹ says:, J. C. M., says:, G. S., & says:, M. W. (2018, April 11). *Irish stereotype*. Illustrating Chinese Exclusion.

<https://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/irish-stereotype/>

³⁰ Britannica Editors (2023, November 14). Seneca Village. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Seneca-Village>

To most middle-class black residents of the city, Five Points was an embarrassment. In retrospect, the Five Points reflected the changing geography of poverty and race within New York City as working-class Irish immigrants moved into and ‘whitened’ previously all-black residential areas.³¹

Five Points became a trope for WASP society. Charles Dickens and other writers would use the district as an example of the dangers of “race-mixing,” even though those very people who scoffed at the so-called impurities were also the ones to patronize its gambling halls and brothels.^{32,33} Figure 2.3 is an example of the racist rhetoric targeting race-mixing, also known as amalgamation, while promoting anti-abolition sentiment in New York City’s Five Points district. The lithograph created by Edward Clay (1839) depicts mixed-race couples mingling in front of the portraits of three Abolitionists.³⁴

Many people, including myself, although having some knowledge of chattel slavery, had a perception that slavery was confined to cotton fields. It wasn’t until much later that I became aware of the total institution of slavery as a sex trafficking, life-altering, genocidal system of degradation that ran its gamut outside of the plantations as well as in the fields.³⁵ Negroes weren’t confined to the fields; in fact, it was typical for oligarchs, who often enslaved people, to lease their laborers to work on canals, railroads, and other fieldwork where many enslaved

³¹ McNally, D. (2023, March 25). *Five Points District, New York City, New York (1830s-1860s)*. BlackPast. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/five-points-district-new-york-city-1830s-1860s/>

³² Gogan, B. (2015, July 28). *The Five points*. The Five Points America’s First Great Slum. <https://billygogan.com/the-five-points/>

³³ Ferris, V. (2012). “Inside of the Family Circle”: Irish and African American Interracial Marriage in New York City’s Eighth Ward, 1870. *American Journal of Irish Studies*, 9, 151–177. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23333101>

³⁴ Clay, E. W. (n.d.). *Practical amalgamation*. [graphic]. Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections. <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3A65139>

³⁵ Feinstein, R. A. (2019). *When rape was legal: The untold history of sexual violence during slavery*. Routledge.

people made contact with “freemen” and non-black individuals as well. Hiring enslaved people or slave renting is a practice that has existed as long as slavery has been an institution in America. Enslavers would rent out enslaved persons to work on railroads, mines, canals, and other plantations.³⁶ The working conditions allowed the opportunity for enslaved, “freemen,” and Irishmen to congregate at workplaces. Frederick Douglass mentions his contact with Irishmen in his Narrative, who instilled in him the confidence to conceive the possibility of one day escaping to the North.³⁷

Even though African Americans and Irish immigrants continued to cohabitate and integrate in northern industrial cities, for several decades leading up to the Civil War, tensions between the two groups were also evident. Dozens of “race wars” resulting in Irish citizens attacking African Americans arose from the competition for resources such as jobs, housing, and overall upward mobility, both socially and economically. Many of these riots were triggered by the most minuscule of events; for instance, in 1834, a mob of Irish Americans destroyed Black businesses and homes and terrorized the residents of a majority Black neighborhood in Moyamensing, PA, after a quarrel at the “Flying Horse” carousel a day earlier. Four years later, in the same state, a mob of nearly 3000 white and Irish residents set Pennsylvania Hall ablaze after it hosted an Abolitionists Consortium.³⁸ The most extensive hostile interactions between Irish immigrants (as well as others, Germans and poor whites especially) and African Americans took place in 1863. The New York Draft Riots transpired when rioters, responding to the Conscription or Enrollment Act passed by Congress earlier that year, caused havoc on Manhattan

³⁶ Sanford, C. D. (2024, May 3). *Hiring out of the enslaved*. Encyclopedia Virginia. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/hiring-out-of-the-enslaved/>

³⁷ Douglass, F. (2021). *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: The original 1845 edition*. Independently published, p 47-48.

³⁸ Grubbs, P. (2022, February 26). *Riots (1830s and 1840s)*. Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/riots-1830s-and-1840s/>

Streets, lynching several Black residents and breaking into an orphanage housing Black children, many of whom were the offspring of Black and Irish parents.³⁹ The damage from the riots was catastrophic and caused nearly 20% of Black residents to flee the borough, many making their way to Harlem.⁴⁰ The Colored Orphan Asylum, which was located on 5th Avenue between 43rd and 44th street at the time, was set ablaze during the Draft Riots, forcing more than 200 women and children to flee with only the clothes on their backs. The Draft Riots lasted several days. It took nearly 10,000 troops, many from the 7th New York Regiment and 152nd New York Infantry (most of whom were either Irish immigrants or of Irish descent), to suppress the riots on the fourth day of its outbreak.⁴¹

The Draft Riots, Pennsylvania Hall being burned, and the Moyamensing Riots were among the many race-based riots that occurred in the mid-19th century. Not all were Irish Americans against Black Americans. Some were white Americans or “Nativists” against Blacks, some consisted of “Nativists” (WASP) against Irish immigrants, and some saw the collaboration of Nativists and Irish against Blacks. Noel Ignatiev points to the mob warfare between the Irish and Blacks as one of the mechanisms used by the Irish to advance their way into the “white” social class. Many historians, such as Ignatiev and David Roediger, share this “Whiteness theory.”⁴² However, Michael Johnson’s dissertation underscores the arguments of historians Eric

³⁹ Hoover, E. C., & Johnson, K. (2013, July 13). *150 Years Ago today: Civil War Draft Riots Grip New York*. National Museum of American History.
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/150-years-ago-today-civil-war-draft-riots-grip-new-york>

⁴⁰ Smith, J. (2018, July 10). What happened during the New York City draft riots?
<https://www.nyhistory.org/blogs/new-york-city-draft-riots>

⁴¹ Vodrey, W. F. B. (2021, August 20). *Blood in the streets: The new york city draft riots*. The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable.
<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/blood-in-the-streets-the-new-york-city-draft-riots/>

⁴² David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

Arnesen and Christian Samito, who reject such a theory. They argue that although Nativists may have “considered Irish Americans inferior...they were still considered white.”⁴³ It is much more likely that the Irish in America achieved greater acceptance in white society because of the influx of more “foreign” immigrants, such as Italians, Jews, Chinese and Eastern Europeans who had very different customs, dress, and languages, rather than their different skin color from African Americans.

Research on commonwealth slave laws has brought me to agree with those who are skeptical of Ignatiev’s theory for several reasons. Even though Irish Catholics were ostracized during the 19th and early 20th century, they still had the privilege of forming a militia, voting, and owning firearms, among other benefits which were restricted from Blacks.⁴⁴ Their ability to create a militia provided them with the physical prowess to thwart Nativists’ attempts to silence them in the same way Nativists were able to silence African Americans.⁴⁵ Their ability to vote and influence local elections, form unions, and monopolize the mining industry—and eventually local governments—gave Irish Americans an advantage over African Americans.⁴⁶ Irish immigrants may have been socially excluded from upward mobility for much of the 19th century, but they were not constitutionally Black, which made a difference. Secondly, post-Civil War relations between the two groups normalized, as Samito would later write.⁴⁷

⁴³ Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 3-32.

⁴⁴ *History of gun restrictions: Oakland / Bay Area Black Gun Owners Association*. Bay Area BGOA. (n.d.). <https://www.obabgoa.com/history-of-gun-restrictions>

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

 **James Woods** 
@RealJamesWoods

#Reparations

The first slaves shipped to the American Colonies in 1619 were 100 white children from Ireland. Truth Matters.

The first slaves imported into the American colonies were 100 White children in 1619, four months before the arrival of a the first shipment of Black slaves. Many were brought from Ireland, where the law held that it was "no more sin to kill an Irishman than a dog or any other brute".



King James II, followed by Charles I and Oliver Cromwell, sold over 500,000 Irish Catholics into slavery throughout the 1600's onto plantations in the West Indies Islands of Antigua, Montserrat, Jamaica, Barbados, as well as Virginia and New England. Irish slaves were less expensive than African, and treated with more cruelty & death.

In the 17th Century, from 1600 until 1699, there were many more Irish sold as slaves than Africans. There are records of Irish slaves well into the 18th Century. Many never made it off the ships. According to written record, in at least one incident 132 slaves, men, women, and children, were dumped overboard to drown because ships' supplies were running low. They were drowned because the insurance would pay for an "accident," but not if the slaves were allowed to starve.

White Slavery
History Denied, Covered Up, & Marginalized

Figure 2.1



The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain and Western Europe. Their remains are found in the barrows, or burying places, in sundry parts of these countries. The skulls are of the prognathous type. They came to Ireland, and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out-competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.

Harper's Weekly, 1899. Artist Unknown, Misusing Darwin's science theories as a basis, the idea of the Irish as less than fully white persisted. This 1899 cartoon showing the Irish stereotype as less evolved, presented as scientific fact 11 years after Nast's last cartoon was published by Harper's. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

Title: "Practical Amalgamation" Creator: Edward W. Clay(1839). Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Description: "Racist print promoting anti-abolitionists' fears of multiracial personal relationships. Depicts a parlor scene where two inter-racial couples court on a couch. In the left, an attractive white women sits on the lap of an African American man. The man, depicted in racist caricature with grotesque facial features, holds a guitar in his right hand as she engages him in a kiss. In the right, a rotund African American woman holds a fan in her right hand as she is wooed by a slender white man on his knees who kisses her left hand. Portraits of abolitionists Arthur Tappan, Daniel O'Connell (a radical Irish abolitionist), and John Quincy Adams are hung on the wall behind the couch. A white and black dog are in the left corner."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Clay, E. W. (n.d.). *Practical amalgamation*. [graphic]. Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections. <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3A65139>

Evolution of Slave Laws from Indentured to Chattel Slavery

| | |
|--------------|--|
| August 1619 | "Twenty and odd" Africans, probably seized from a Portuguese slave ship, were carried to Jamestown, Virginia, and traded for provisions. They were classified as indentured servants. |
| July 9, 1640 | John Punch becomes the first African man sentenced to life enslavement after being captured along with two other runaway indentured servants. The General Court of Colonial Virginia gave the white servants additional years to serve. |
| 1641 | Massachusetts became the first North American colony to recognize slavery as a legal institution. |
| 1662 | A Virginia law passed in 1662 stated that the status of the mother determined if a Black child would be enslaved. |
| 1665 | In 1665, Anthony Johnson moved to Maryland and leased a 300-acre plantation, where he died five years later. But back in Virginia that same year, a jury decided the land Johnson left behind could be seized by the government because he was a "negroe and by consequence an alien." ⁴⁹ |
| 1698 | In 1698, the English Parliament ruled that any British subject could trade in slaves. Over the first 50 years of the 18 th century, the number of Africans brought to British colonies on British ships rose from 5,000 to 45,000 a year. |
| 1705 | The Virginia Slave Code established the status of the enslaved, further limited their freedom, and defined some rights of slave owners. It |

⁴⁹ Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.-b). *Africans in America/part 1/document re. Anthony Johnson*. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h314.html>

included provisions stating that non-Christians brought to Virginia would be enslaved, even if they converted to Christianity. It also allowed slave owners to punish the enslaved without fear of legal repercussions and specified the rewards for the recapture of runaway slaves. The law also certified all people of African descent to be property and thus life-long slaves.

Table 2.1 was taken from Jim Crow Museum: Slavery in America, and PBS: From Indentured Servant to Racial Slavery^{50,51}



Table 2.2

⁵⁰ Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.-a). *Africans in America | part 1 | narrative | from indentured servitude to racial slavery*. PBS.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1narr3.html>

⁵¹ *Slavery in America*. Jim Crow Museum. (n.d.).

<https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/timeline/slavery.htm>

Chapter 3: **Trans-Atlantic Bond between Black Abolitionists and the Anti-Slavery Movement in Ireland**

“Such is the state of public opinion in America, and you find the poison running through everything. With the exception of the Abolitionists, you will find people of all classes thus contaminated. The whole army and navy of the United States are pledged to pursue and shoot down the poor fugitives, who, panting for liberty.... All dominations of professing Christians are guilty of sustaining or defending slavery.” ~ Sara P. Remond⁵²

As the divisions between African Americans and Irish Americans grew tense in antebellum society, bonds were strengthening between African Americans and Irish Catholics in Ireland. This chapter will highlight influential participants who fostered pride in shared struggles, inspiring the audience to appreciate the transatlantic solidarity in Abolitionism. It will discuss several Black Abolitionists including Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, and Sara Parker Remond, who are just three of nearly a dozen Black Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland and Britain to gain support in their fight against slavery.⁵³ This chapter will discuss the broader connections between African Americans and Irish Catholics in Ireland in the 19th century by examining the memoirs of several Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland in the 1800s for financial and social support for emancipation.

Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, was one of the first enslaved Africans in America to travel to Europe in search of obtaining empathy and unity with critics of slavery (see figure 3.1). Having been born in the 1700s in West Africa, Equiano voiced his opposition to the peculiar institution of the slave trade and the slave system while the transatlantic slave trade was still operating. His rise in popularity came after publishing his memoir, The Life of Olaudah

⁵² Remond, S. P. (n.d.). *Why Slavery Is Still Rampant in the Land*. Speaking While Female Speech Bank. <https://speakingwhilefemale.co/anti-slavery-remond/>

⁵³ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, which he spent most of his life defending from skeptics' charges of plagiarism.⁵⁴

Equiano traveled to Dublin in 1791 to oversee the fourth edition of his narrative, which at this point had gained enough notoriety across Great Britain and Ireland to garner the formerly enslaved author recognition.⁵⁵ During his eight-month stay in Ireland, the Abolitionist visited Belfast and Dublin, where he met and was housed by prominent members like Samuel Neilson, a founding member of the United Irishmen, an organization “formed in the autumn of 1791 as a middle-class club dedicated to achieving parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation... eventually transformed into a mass-based, secret revolutionary organization determined to establish a non-sectarian republic in Ireland.”⁵⁶

The visit also coincided with heightened Irish Nationalism; it was two years after the French Revolution and seven years before the Irish rebellion for religious rights in 1798. Equiano's efforts to end the Transatlantic Slave Trade resonated with Irish struggles for religious and social justice, illustrating how Irish political turmoil created a receptive environment for abolitionist ideas.⁵⁷

Oludah Equiano's visit to Ireland and Britain was significant for several reasons: other than being the first documented formerly enslaved person, or “freedman,” to travel to Europe and discuss his ordeal, he established a blueprint for Black Abolitionists who would soon follow by mapping a trail of engagement that recognized friendly entities who would welcome Black

⁵⁴ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge. 44

⁵⁵ Ibid, 44-45

⁵⁶ Curtin NJ. The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-6. *Irish Historical Studies*. 1985;24(96):463-492. doi:10.1017/S0021121400034477

⁵⁷ Sweeney, F., Dillane, F., & Stuart, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Ireland, slavery, anti-slavery and Empire*. Routledge, 124.

Abolitionists. In addition, he authored a biographical narrative upon which later Abolitionists would model to supplement traveling and lodging expenses while overseas. The presence of a dark, robust, articulate figure helped ameliorate stereotypes of Africans in the European psyche. This pivotal barrier needed to be broken to provide a less hostile welcome to those who followed, inspiring admiration and respect for Equiano's pioneering role.⁵⁸

Besides Harriet Tubman, who is famously recognized for helping hundreds escape from slavery through the Underground Railroad, Sarah Parker Remond should also be mentioned among the most notable Black female Abolitionists in American History (see figure 3.2). Unlike Harriet Tubman, Sarah Remond was not born in bondage, yet the absence of bondage didn't exempt her from the obstacles she faced in life.

As an African American woman born free from bondage in Salem, Massachusetts in 1826, Sarah Remond had always been outspoken against slavery, misogyny, and social injustice. Remond's catapult to fame came in 1853 after she was refused admission to a public theatre in Boston and an attendant pushed her down the stairs. Remond publicized the incident in the press, which resulted in the theatre being fined and "made to pay legal costs" for Ms. Remond. Her ability to draw media attention to unjust events, coupled with her advocacy for abolition and women's suffrage, earned her positions with the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society.⁵⁹

In 1859, Remond set sail to Ireland, as her older brother, Charles Remond, who was also an Abolitionist, had done nearly 20 years prior. While in Dublin, Remond was hosted by Richard and Hannah Webb, leaders of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society (HASS), who had hosted many

⁵⁸ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

⁵⁹ *Massachusetts Historical Society. founded 1791*. MHS Collections Online: Sarah Parker Remond. (n.d.). https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=1300&pid=3

Abolitionists, including her brother, Charles Remond, and Frederick Douglass, decades earlier.⁶⁰ While in Ireland, Remond spoke in Dublin, Waterford, Clonmel, and Cork for several months before traveling to England to lecture. She had the advantage of advocating for emancipation from a woman's perspective.⁶¹ Many of her speeches detailed the horrors of women being raped and objectified at the hands of their masters and mistresses of the house.⁶² However, her oratory advantage as a female also greatly disadvantaged her in society. As a woman, Sara Remond didn't receive the same privileges as African American male Abolitionists. Some organizations in America and Europe were men-only, and the media often printed merely summaries of her speeches.⁶³

In contrast, Douglass and other male Abolitionists would enjoy the luxury of having their full transcripts printed in the press. Some historians argue that Sara Remond was indeed a superior orator to her older brother, Charles, and matched—or even surpassed—the eloquence of Frederick Douglass. Still, she was never fully recognized as such because of her gender.⁶⁴

Sarah Remond's visit to Ireland marked a new era in Abolitionism. Not only was she a ferocious advocate for her enslaved brethren, but she drew tremendous attention to the often unrecognized abominable treatment of enslaved women. Sara Remond's humanitarian perspective highlights the premise that women suffered at extraordinary levels. In addition to the propensity of being separated from their children whom they had birthed, they faced rape, mistreatment, and mutilation, along with the horrid conditions that enslaved men experienced.⁶⁵

Reymond can also be recognized as one of the first “Black media influencers” of the 19th century,

⁶⁰ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 245-251

⁶² *Ibid*, 260.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 254

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 254

⁶⁵ Salenius, S. (2016). *An Abolitionist Abroad Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe*. University of Massachusetts Press. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/56825/>

after using the law to oppose the constructs of racial bigotry in Massachusetts and newspaper outlets to publish and draw attention to her mistreatment when the American Embassy refused to issue her a Visa; her influence increased exponentially thanks to newspapers in Northern Ireland and England who printed her correspondence with the U.S. in detail.⁶⁶

Frederick Douglass is one of the most influential and recognizable figures in Black History(see figure 3.3). His enormity, to many, matches that of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Barack and Michelle Obama, and others. However, as William Rogers explained in his book We Are All Together Now, Douglass's influence was often overlooked after his death.⁶⁷ Born into slavery, Douglass rarely saw his mother and suspected his father to be his mother's enslaver. After being sold to the Auld family, he became the servant and companion of young Thomas Auld in 1847.⁶⁸ Douglass learned how to read from Thomas's mother during this period of bondage.⁶⁹ As a companion and servant, Douglass (whose surname was changed from Bailey after escaping slavery) was leased out to work on docks in and around the Baltimore area. While working the docks, Frederick Douglass worked with nonmembers of the enslaved community, including Irishmen and freemen, who gave him and other enslaved people the desire to escape to freedom.⁷⁰

After an early attempt in 1836 to escape slavery failed, Douglass was successful two years later when he fled to New York and married Anna Murray, who was also instrumental in assisting in his escape.⁷¹ Life in New York proved to be a liberating one on several fronts:

⁶⁶ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

⁶⁷ Rogers, W. B. (1995). *We are all together now: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and the prophetic tradition*. Garland Publishing, INC.

⁶⁸ Douglass, F. (2021). *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: The original 1845 edition*. Independently published.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 41

⁷⁰ Ibid, pg. 47-48

⁷¹ Ibid, pg. 87-99.

Frederick and Anna Douglass dwelled in a Quaker community where Douglass was able to associate himself with Abolitionists, and he became familiar with the newspaper started by William Lloyd Garrison (who is discussed in the following chapter). This would prove to be a pivotal point in Douglass's life, because Garrison's publication The Liberator would give Douglass tremendous exposure to the Abolition platform.⁷² For several years, Frederick Douglass continued to fuel the flame of Abolition in his soul; he would routinely read Abolitionist articles written in The Liberator and The Narrator. At an anti-slavery meeting in 1841, Douglass met William Lloyd Garrison, the creator of The Liberator, who was moved by Douglass's speech and asked him to join the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) as a lecturer.⁷³ The collaboration of Douglass and Garrison would prove to be a powerful yet often contentious bond which undoubtedly propelled the duo to the forefront of American Abolitionism.

Frederick Douglass's association with Garrison and the AASS made him a recognizable figure to Abolitionist organizations across the Atlantic, including the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society, where two of its founders, Richard D. Webb and Richard Allan, welcomed the fugitive Abolitionist to Dublin in 1845.⁷⁴ Although Douglass' original mission to the Emerald Isle was to oversee the republication of his narrative in Ireland, anti-slavery organizations in Ireland, including the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society (HASS), Belfast Ladies Anti-Slavery Association (BLASA), Belfast Anti-Slavery Society (BAS), and others, encouraged the Abolitionist to give several lectures on the horrors of slavery. For a period of several months, Douglass' mission transitioned towards educating Irish Abolitionists on the destitution of chattel slavery and the

⁷² Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.108.

⁷³ Rogers, W. B. (1995). *We are all together now: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and the prophetic tradition*. Garland Publishing, INC 132.

⁷⁴ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.108.

hypocrisy of religious institutions' failure to condemn the slave institution.⁷⁵ The latter perspective earned Douglass the ire of many religious figures in Ireland, so much so that many churches refused to invite Douglass to speak at their sanctuary. This tension between Douglass and church leaders deepened when his mentor, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, pivoted their lectures toward a divestment message to persuade the Presbyterian churches to reject funds from American institutions that were silent on slavery.⁷⁶ During his "Send Back the Blood-Stained Money" campaign, Douglass spoke to members of the Relief Church in Scotland, on April 25, 1846:

Who is responsible for slavery? The Free Church of Scotland has made itself responsible for slavery, by regarding these men as the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. Think of this, Christian men and women of Scotland! (Great-cheering.) This religious denomination, claiming the high and holy title of Free to be the exponent of all that is good and holy in the moral and religious sentiments of Scotland, comes forward and holds up the slaveholder as being a Christian, and then when I have thrown off my fetters, found my way here, and attempted to speak on behalf of my brethren, do they say welcome, bondsman, come let us see your wrongs and we are prepared to redress them.⁷⁷

Sometimes referred to as the Black O'Connell, Frederick Douglass tended to agitate audiences on both sides of the Atlantic by highlighting discrepancies within organized religions to advocate empathy and humility among Christians, while remaining silent about enslaved Christians.⁷⁸ Whereas many Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland have been forgotten, Douglass' impact on the Emerald Isle solidified an already strong bond between African Americans and

⁷⁵ Ibid, 121

⁷⁶ Ibid, 121

⁷⁷ Douglass, F. (n.d.). *Send Back the Blood-Stained Money: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on April 25, 1846*. Send back the blood-stained money: An address delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on April 25, 1846 · Digital Edition · Frederick Douglass papers project. <https://frederickdouglasspapersproject.com/s/digitaledition/item/8054>

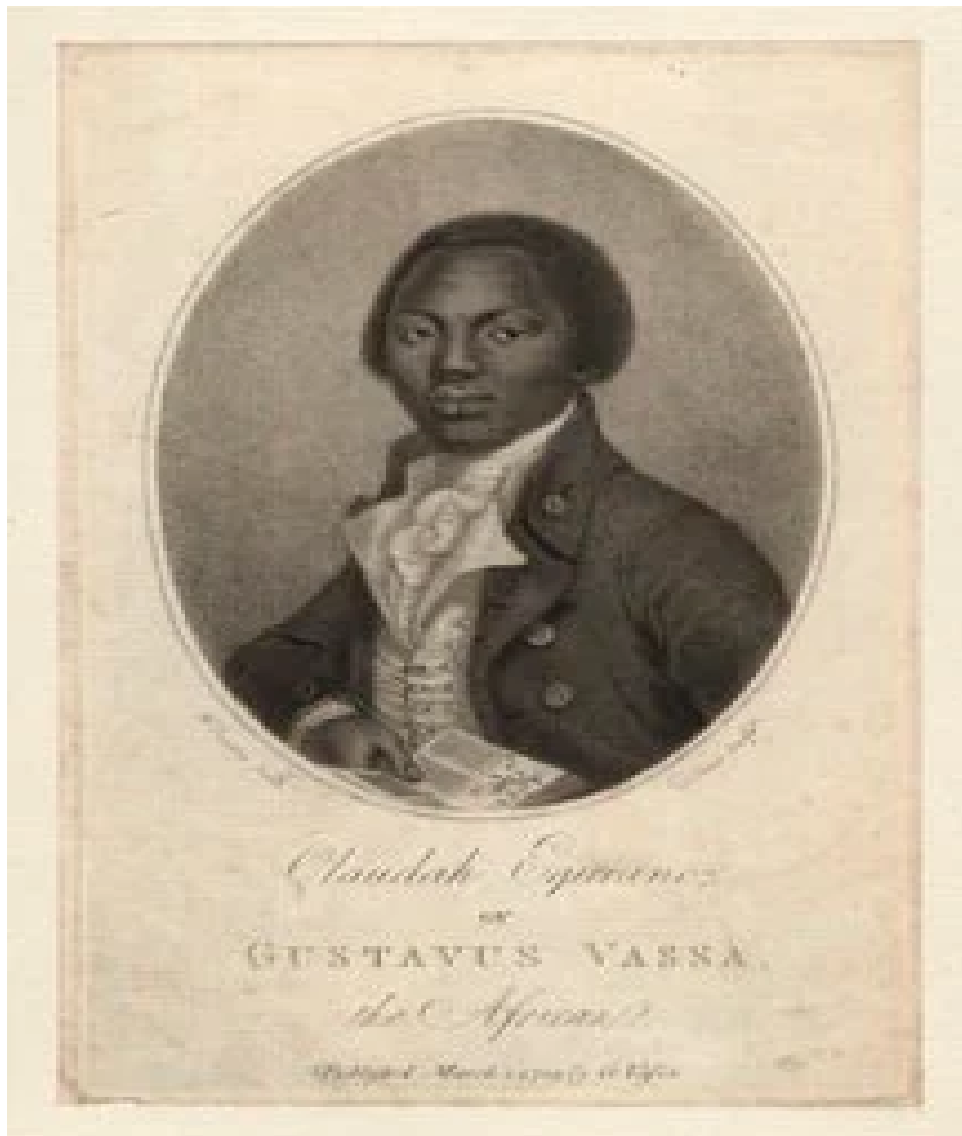
⁷⁸ O'Hanlon, O. (2025, October 6). *Mutual admiration: Anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass and his connections to Daniel O'Connell and Ireland*. The Irish Times.

Ireland to this day. Having a statue erected of him in Belfast (See figure 3.4)⁷⁹ further substantiates his impact, not just on the lives of Irish people but also across Western Europe.

Olaudah Equiano was the first Black Abolitionist to visit Ireland. Sarah P. Remond was the first Black female Abolitionist to visit Ireland to advocate for the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage. Her fierce and defiant demeanor forbade her from yielding to the social constructs of servitude or the oppressive mechanisms of social class structure imposed upon women. Frederick Douglass, being nationally recognized as one of the most famous American Abolitionists, Black or white, visited Ireland to increase the support of those in favor of dismantling the peculiar institution known as chattel slavery and to advocate for social equality for African Americans. His oratorical prowess, erudition, and philosophical explanation helped propel Douglass as the most influential and recognized Black Abolitionist of the time.

Many Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland did so for a purpose: whether it was to sell a biography, raise money for the cause, escape servitude, or to draw attention to the immorality of slavery. A Transatlantic bond formed amongst the courageous people who put their lives in further peril by conjuring support in favor of Abolition and speaking out against the constitutional hypocrisy evident in the country that enslaved their people. While this chapter focused on Black Abolitionists who strengthened the Transatlantic bond between African Americans and Ireland, the following chapter will highlight important supporters of the Black community in America and Ireland, who were just as crucial in the fight for freedom.

⁷⁹ Adams, G. (2023, August 5). *Gerry Adams: Frederick Douglass comes home to a city that took him to its heart*. Belfast Media Group.
<https://belfastmedia.com/frederick-douglass-takes-pride-of-place-in-belfast>



(Figure 3.1)

Olaudah Equiano ('Gustavus Vassa') by Daniel Orme, published by Olaudah Equiano ('Gustavus Vassa'), after W. Denton published 1 March 1789 NPG D8546⁸⁰

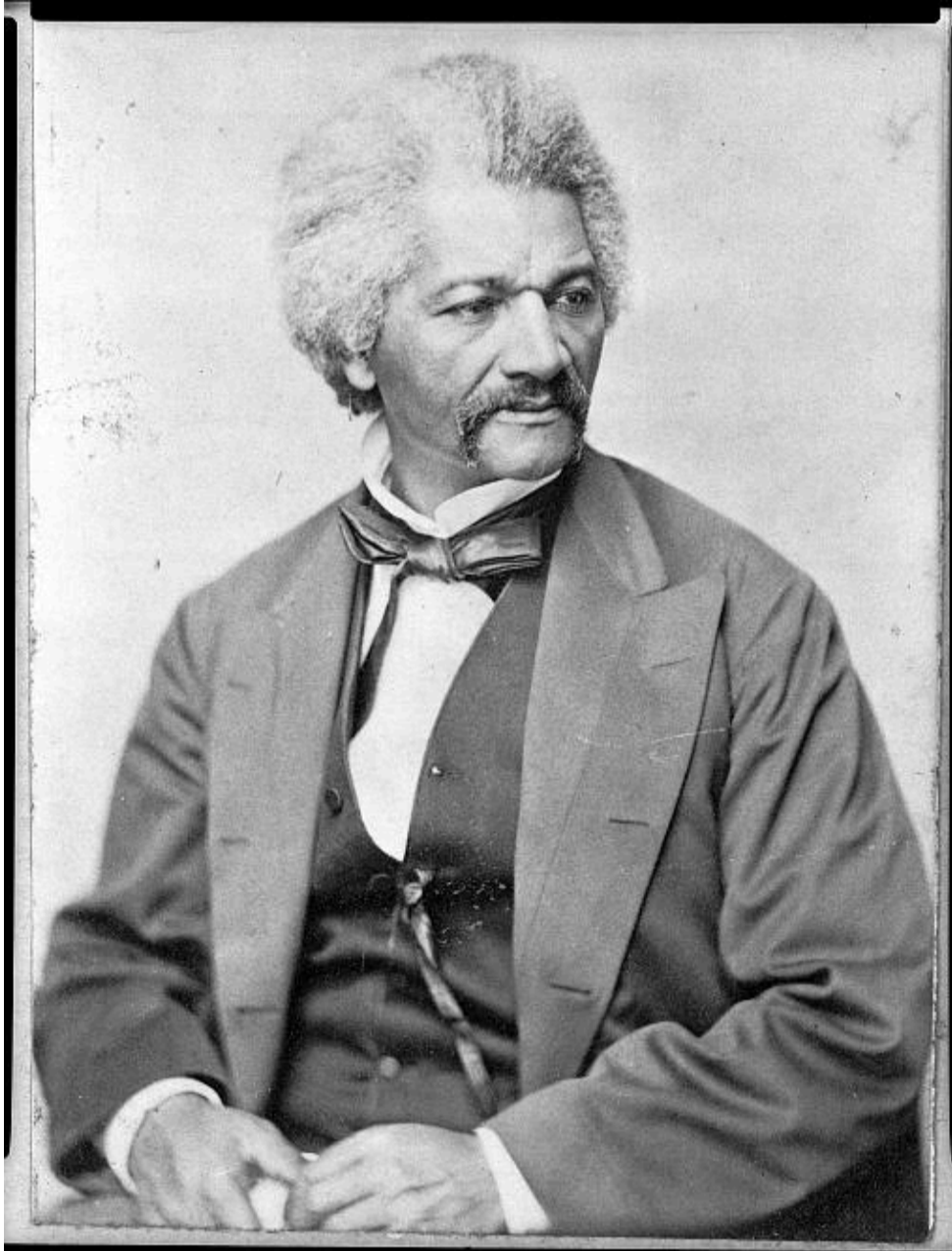
⁸⁰ Orford, E. (2023, August 7). *When Angela Davis met Bernadette Devlin*. Pluto Press. <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/when-angela-davis-met-bernadette-devlin/>



(Figure 3.2)

Portrait of Sarah Parker Remond, photographer unknown, c. 1865, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem MA.⁸¹

⁸¹ *Sarah Parker remond*. The Fight for Black Mobility: Traveling to Mid-Century Conventions. (2025, April 13).



(Figure 3.3)

Frederick Douglass, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right, 1870. Photo by George Frances Schreiber. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a18122>⁸²

⁸² Lindberg, M. (2020, February 28). *Frederick Douglass and the power of pictures: Picture this*. The Library of Congress. <https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2020/02/frederick-douglass-and-the-power-of-pictures/>



(Figure 3.4)

“A statue dedicated to anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass was unveiled in Belfast City Centre on 31 July 2023. The life-size statue of the famous author, anti-slavery campaigner and early women’s rights campaigner was created by renowned Scottish figurative sculptors Alan Beattie Herriot and Hector Guest.”⁸³

⁸³ Wickham, C. (2023a, August 1). *Anti-slavery campaigner statue unveiled in Belfast City Centre*. Ireland Before You Die. <https://www.irelandbeforeyoudie.com/frederick-douglas-statue-belfast/>

Chapter 4: Abolitionists Near and Abroad

Of all men living, an American citizen, who is the owner of slaves, is the most despicable; he is a political hypocrite of the very worst description. The friends of humanity and liberty, in Europe, should join in one universal cry of shame on the American slaveholders! “Base wretches,” should we shout in chorus—“base wretches, how dare you profane the temple of national freedom, the sacred fane of republican rites, with the presence and the sufferings of human beings in chains and slavery?” - Daniel O’Connell (1829)⁸⁴

In the third chapter, we learned about three influential Black Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland and were welcomed at its venues to bring attention to the anti-slavery movement. To deepen this understanding, it is essential to highlight the often underreported roles of women and Irish Abolitionists who supported these efforts. So much is written and can further be said about Black Abolitionists who risked their lives to oppose the American institution of slavery. But they weren’t alone. Connections were established, meetings were held, and contacts were made to ensure their travel, expenses, and stays were covered. Many people and organizations sacrificed their time and livelihood to assist American Abolitionists in drawing attention to America’s “peculiar institution.”^{85,86} Previous chapters highlighted the influential Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and his transatlantic influence, which spearheaded communication between many Black and Irish people as well as institutions for abolition, such as the Hibernian

⁸⁴ American Anti-Slavery Society. (1860). *Daniel O’Connell upon American slavery: With other Irish testimonies* (Anti-Slavery Tracts, No. 5, New Series). [The Library of Congress](#).

⁸⁵ The term "peculiar institution" was popularized by John C. Calhoun, the seventh president of the United States and a southern politician. Southern politicians often used this term to describe the perceived benefits of chattel slavery, framing it as a necessary institution despite its devastating impact.

⁸⁶ Mark, H. W. (2025, July 16). *John C. Calhoun: Champion of the antebellum south*. World History Encyclopedia. https://www.worldhistory.org/John_C._Calhoun/

Anti-slavery Society, Women's Anti-slavery Societies, and arguably the most influential abolitionist not born on American soil, Daniel O'Connell.

This chapter underscores the efforts of William Lloyd Garrison to challenge the institution of slavery in America and abroad. Garrison, (see figure 4.1), was outspoken against the Catholic Church and its refusal to condemn slavery in the United States. Garrison is significant not only because he was a radical opponent of slavery who co-founded The Liberator, which gave a voice to so many Abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass and Charles and Sara Remond, to speak against the tyranny of slavery, but also because, in conjunction with the former, Garrison founded both the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and then the American Anti-Slavery Society. These organizations provided a platform and resources for an Abolitionist to travel and lecture both home and abroad as they introduced themselves and their fight for emancipation to the country and world. In 1829, Garrison joined fellow Quaker and Abolitionist Benjamin Lundy in Baltimore to co-edit a Quaker Anti-slavery newspaper, Genius of Universal Emancipation.⁸⁷ Two years later, Garrison would eventually start The Liberator, and the American Anti-Slavery Society would follow four years later. Both entities served as mechanisms of Abolitionists' voices, and focused on the immediate emancipation and equality of African Americans, as well as women's suffrage, all while challenging most churches and churchmen's failure to denounce slavery.⁸⁸

Out of the ten Black Abolitionists who traveled to Ireland, as mentioned in Christine Kinealy's book Black Abolitionists in Ireland, William Lloyd Garrison had a direct or indirect impact on all except one: Olaudah Equiano, who unfortunately died before the birth of The

⁸⁷Rogers, W. B. (1995). *We are all together now: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and the prophetic tradition*. Garland Publishing, INC. 50

⁸⁸ Ibid, 51

Liberator in 1833. Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society provided a platform for Abolitionists to speak, and The Liberator provided the opportunity for Abolitionists and "freedmen" to publish their speeches, memoirs, autobiographies, and positions on matters, whether he agreed with them or not.⁸⁹ Using The Liberator as a mechanism for philosophical reproach is arguably one of Garrison's most significant contributions to Abolitionism. Douglass' and O'Connell's speeches were frequently featured in The Liberator. O'Connell, (see figure 4.2), who was Catholic, had religious beliefs that Garrison would deem antithetical to his Quaker perspectives. Douglass's prophetic values didn't always align with Garrison's, regarding the strength of America's constitutional role in Abolition.⁹⁰

Douglass, O'Connell, and Garrison, although possessing different perspectives on religion and the radicalization of Abolition, were able to effectively merge behind the ultimate objective of ending slavery. The transatlantic network established between the American Anti-slavery Society and various entities across Ireland, including Abolitionist organizations such as the Hibernian Anti-slavery Society, as well as the ability to elicit the alliance with O'Connell formed, one could say, the Justice League of Abolitionists.

Daniel O'Connell has a place as one of the most significant historical figures I had never learned about before my doctoral studies. The sheer nerve of a man to defy British Colonialism and achieve Catholic Emancipation while pioneering a lifelong struggle for repeal of the Act of Union is enough to win the hearts of any Irish Catholic. He carried an unwavering stance against American slavery. Although he may not have been directly affected by the institution of slavery, he was vociferously outspoken to the point where he refused to visit the United States as long as

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior. (n.d.-b). "*The Liberator*" (*U.S. National Park Service*). National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/the-liberator.htm>

⁹⁰ Rogers, W. B. (1995). *We are all together now: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and the prophetic tradition*. Garland Publishing, INC.

slavery existed, saying, “I have often longed to go there in reality; but so long as it is tarnished by slavery, I will never pollute my foot by treading on its shores.”⁹¹ Earning the name of “The Liberator” after Catholic Emancipation in 1829, his advocacy for emancipation,⁹² women’s rights, and termination of slavery in British-controlled India was enough to earn the admiration of Wm. Lloyd Garrison (who was not very fond of Catholics). “Garrison’s admiration for O’Connell was unmistakable. In the first edition of his new newspaper, O’Connell’s admonishment to American citizens was reprinted.”⁹³

Daniel O’Connell’s influence on Frederick Douglass was also evident. When The Liberator began publishing O’Connell’s speeches on slavery, Abolitionists were so impressed and moved by them that many contemplated whether O’Connell was a Black man.⁹⁴

O’Connell’s influence and collaborations with American Black Abolitionists also played a pivotal role in the fight for emancipation and in strengthening Black-Irish Catholic relations in Ireland. Abolitionists’ fervor for emancipation was met with much more resistance than support. Prominent members of the Catholic faith, such as John Hughes, the first Archbishop in New York and a well-known Catholic leader, implored his congregants not to oppose America’s institution of slavery, as he viewed the status of his fellow Catholics as more important than that of the slaves. His appeal was echoed through the chapels of many Catholic and Protestant clergy and in the halls of congressional leaders.⁹⁵ Daniel O’Connell’s advocacy for emancipation,

⁹¹ *Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879; the story of his life told by his children: Volume 1.* Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879; the story of his life told by his children: volume 1, Chapter 11: first mission to England.-1833. (n.d.).p.376.

⁹² Kinealy, C. (2016). *Daniel O’Connell and the anti-slavery movement: “The saddest people the sun sees.”* Routledge.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 48

⁹⁴ Quarles, B. (1977). *Black abolitionists.* Oxford University Press.

⁹⁵ McEvoy, D. (2021, March 5). *New York Irish, slavery, the Civil War and archbishop “dagger Hughes”.* IrishCentral.com.

including his speeches and public stance, directly influenced Irish and American Abolitionist networks by fostering a shared sense of purpose and moral obligation.⁹⁶ His appeal for emancipation exemplified rising sympathy amongst people in Ireland and Great Britain, along with the financial support of many anti-slavery societies to help construct and fortify the narrative (not necessarily change, however) for Abolitionists to defend their argument for emancipation.⁹⁷ O’Connell’s reputation as the Liberator helped strengthen the support among Irish Catholics. Christine Kinealy writes in the Irish America magazine (2011) that O’Connell was able to change the Protestant view of enslaved persons from one that saw them as needing to be Christianized to one that did not. That requires empathy and humanity regardless of religion:

Finally, O’Connell brought a Catholic dimension to a movement that had, up to that time, been overwhelmingly associated with Protestant evangelicals. Unlike the evangelicals, he did not regard slaves as heathens who would benefit from being converted to Christianity, but as men and women who could not reach their potential until they were free. Overall, O’Connell brought a more inclusive and humanitarian dimension to anti-slavery agitation.⁹⁸

O’Connell’s broadening of views from a victorious Catholic Emancipation movement to goals involving Negro Emancipation helped shift the traditional Protestant narrative (although not all Protestants adopted this narrative), which supported America’s recolonization efforts, baptizing enslaved people and gradual emancipation to immediate emancipation, and equal rights, laying the groundwork for the trans-Atlantic Bond that is still evident today. O’Connell was able to encourage his followers not to sympathize but to empathize by comparing the

⁹⁶ Kinealy, C. (2022a, August 3). *The Irish abolitionist: Daniel O’Connell: Irish America*. Irish America|. <https://www.irishamerica.com/2011/08/the-irish-abolitionist-daniel-oconnell-2/>

⁹⁷ Kinealy, C. (2016). *Daniel O’CONNELL and the anti-slavery movement: “The saddest people the sun sees.”* Routledge.

⁹⁸ Kinealy, C. (2022a, August 3). *The Irish abolitionist: Daniel O’Connell: Irish America*. Irish America |. <https://www.irishamerica.com/2011/08/the-irish-abolitionist-daniel-oconnell-2/>

struggles and degradation of the enslaved Americans to the destitution and subjugation of the Irish Catholics imposed on them by the British Empire.

Richard Allen, Richard D. Webb, and James Haughton were all born to Quaker Families in Ireland. Each with different apprenticeships and talents: Allen (figure 4.3), a draper and philanthropist; Webb (figure 4.4), an Irish publisher; and Houghton (figure 4.5), a reformer, would use those talents and passions for the Abolition of slavery to form one of the most influential anti-slavery organizations in 19th century Ireland.⁹⁹ The Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society (HASS) was one of the leading intermediaries that helped strengthen the bond between African Americans and Irish people sympathetic to the struggle to gain human rights and end chattel slavery.¹⁰⁰ In 1842, the society helped draft “The Address from the People of Ireland to their countrymen and countrywomen in America.” It gathered thousands of signatures with Daniel O’Connell. It was brought to American soil by Abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond as an attempt to discourage Irish Catholics from supporting the institution of slavery.¹⁰¹

From Charles Lenox Remond to Frederick Douglass and Sara Parker Remond, HASS welcomed and corresponded with more Abolitionists across the Atlantic than the more than a dozen Anti-slavery Societies in Ireland so far researched for this study. The functions of each founder were proven to be crucial auxiliaries to their friends in America. They published the biographies and speeches of Black Abolitionists and set up speaking engagements. Richard and

⁹⁹ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

¹⁰⁰ While the title emphasizes the bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics, it also recognizes that relationships extended beyond these groups to non-Catholic Irish. Anti-Slavery movements involved both Catholic and Protestant influences, as noted in this thesis. The focus on Irish Catholic oppression and its parallels with Black subjugation in America aims to illuminate shared experiences of grief, persecution, and collaboration across different cultural and religious backgrounds, deepening the understanding of cross-cultural connections.

¹⁰¹ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge. 93.

Hannah Webb housed Abolitionists Douglass, Remond, Garrison, and others when they visited Dublin to advocate emancipation.¹⁰²

What also made the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society different from other anti-slavery societies in Ireland is that its founders were Quakers who, like Catholics at one point, were themselves suffering from discrimination by the Church of England and the government.¹⁰³ Their society acted at various times as an auxiliary to Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society but did not discriminate against meetings held with members of different faiths or genders.

Organizations similar to the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society, although they had shown hospitality to Abolitionists like Douglass, were more Presbyterian-leaning. Douglass walked a thin line between the Presbyterian and Quaker anti-slavery organizations during his early visits.¹⁰⁴ Still, later meetings created tension with Presbyterian organizations when Douglass and others began to highlight the discrepancies in the Catholic and Protestant Churches' failure to condemn slavery in America and British-controlled India.¹⁰⁵

Throughout Ireland and Scotland, anti-slavery societies were established in the cities and counties of Belfast, Cork, Glasgow, Clogher, Dublin, and Limerick.¹⁰⁶ Some aligned themselves with the Garrisonian worldview of immediate emancipation, while others favored a more gradual

¹⁰² Ibid, 80.

¹⁰³ History.com (Ed.). (2025b, May 27). *Quakers*. History.com. <https://www.history.com/articles/history-of-quakerism>

¹⁰⁴ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge. 115.

¹⁰⁵ Frederick Douglass, "American Slavery, American Religion, and the Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on May 22, 1846." *American Slavery: Report of a Public Meeting Held at Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields, to Receive Frederick Douglass, the American Slave, on Friday, May 22, 1846* (London, 1846), 3-24. Blassingame, John (et al, eds.). *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Vol. I, p. 269.

¹⁰⁶ Rodgers, N. (2000). *Equiano and anti-slavery in eighteenth-century Belfast*. Belfast Society in association with the Ulster Historical Foundation.

apprenticeship. Each welcomed Abolitionists to speak at their organization and helped raise money for the Abolitionists' cause.¹⁰⁷

The title of this dissertation may emphasize a bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics, both in the United States and in their transatlantic bond with Ireland, which has often been underreported or under-taught in U.S. history. Yet beneath the title's surface also lies the underreported significance of women in the Abolitionist movement. Women played an important role in Negro Emancipation by organizing anti-slavery movements, raising funds to finance publications, conventions, and speeches, and supplementing the housing and travel expenses of Abolitionists. There is not nearly enough written about these unwavering matriarchs in society. The remainder of the chapter will feature the anti-slavery movements led by Irish women and highlight several Irish and British female Abolitionists who had a large impact on the movement toward emancipation.

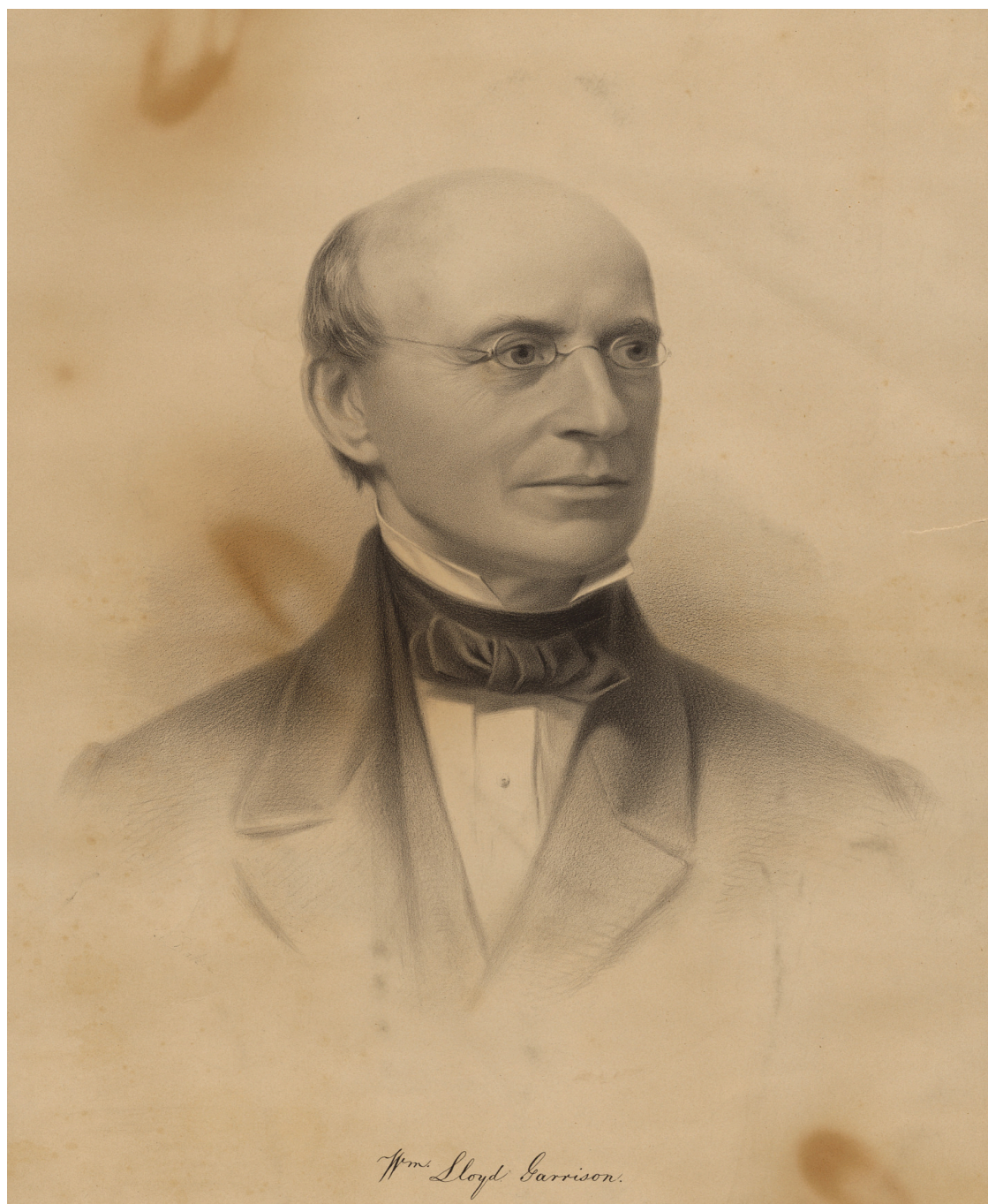
Christine Kinealy writes in her book Frederick Douglass and Ireland: In His Own Words that by the 1850s, women's Abolitionist organizations had outnumbered male organizations.¹⁰⁸ By the time of emancipation, in Ireland alone, there were women's anti-slavery societies in Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Salem, and Clogher. With each having a significant role in the quest for Abolition, these anti-slavery societies, spearheaded by women, dealt a substantial blow to the institution of slavery by supplementing funds for Abolitionist newspapers such as The Liberator and The North Star, donating goods to bazaars to be sold, distributing pamphlets at piers to Irish emigrants heading to America, and more. The passion for voting, the cessation of slave labor, and protections for women and child laborers are evident in the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery

¹⁰⁷ Kinealy, C. (2021). *Black abolitionists in Ireland*. Routledge.

¹⁰⁸ Kinealy, C. (2018). *Frederick Douglass and Ireland: In his own words*. Routledge.

Society's rules and resolutions handbook established at the society's conception in May 1828 (figure 4.6).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society. *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with Lists of the District Treasurers, Committee and Secretaries; and of the Subscribers*. Pamphlets. printed for the Society, by R. Napper, 1828. <https://jstor.org/stable/60238750>.



(Figure 4.1)

Lithograph of William Lloyd Garrison (1864) by artist Joseph Edward Baker. Currently located at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution¹¹⁰

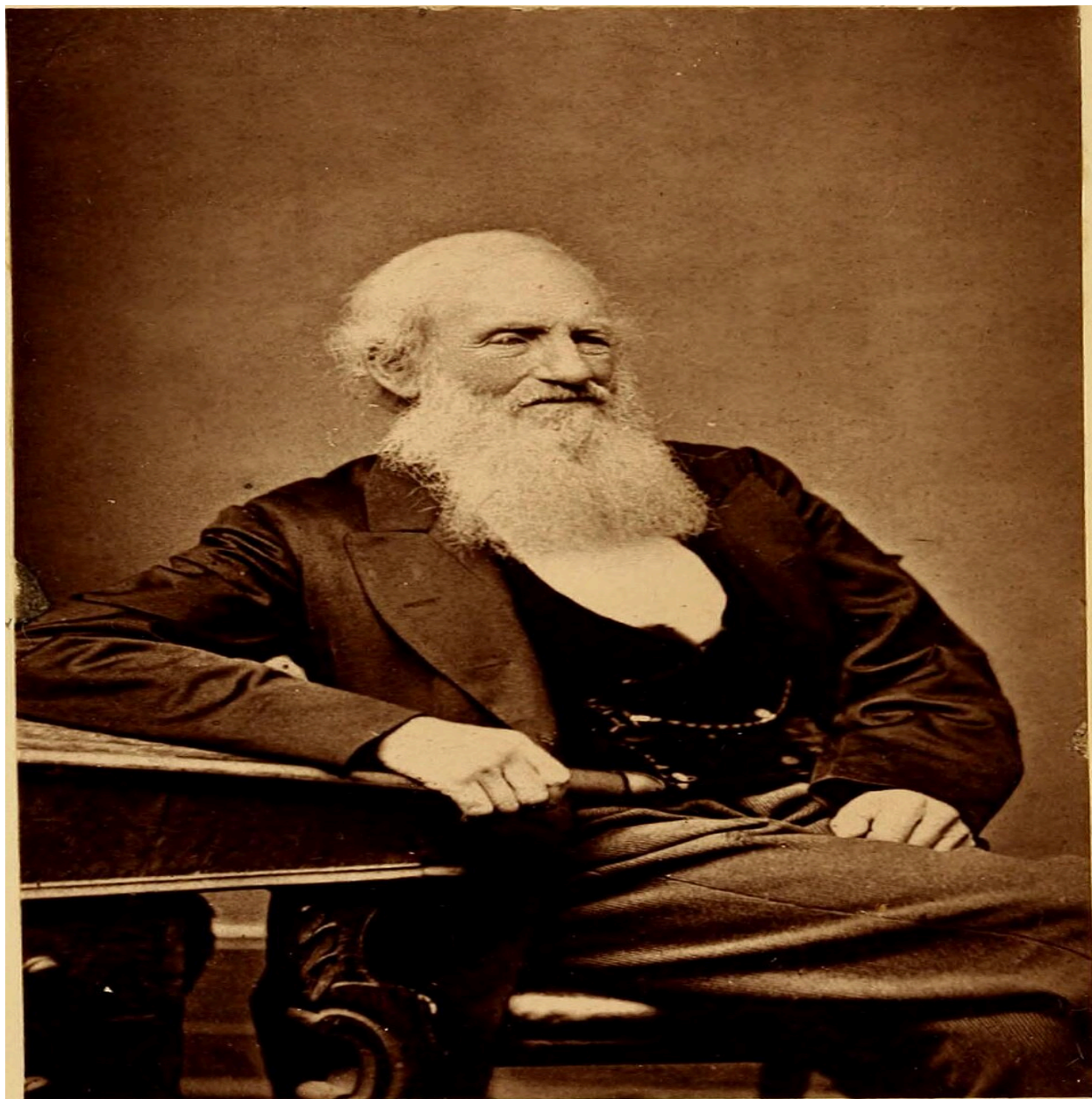
¹¹⁰ Baker, J. E. (n.d.). *William Lloyd Garrison*. National Portrait Gallery.



(Figure 4.2)

Daniel O'Connell. Artist: Bernard Mulrenin (1836). Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ NPG 208; Daniel O'Connell - Portrait - National Portrait Gallery. (n.d.-b).
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw04729/Daniel-OConnell>



(Figure 4.3)

This portrait depicts Richard Allen, (1803-1886). From the collection of The Massachusetts Historical Society.¹¹²

¹¹² *Massachusetts Historical Society, founded 1791*. MHS Collections Online: Richard Allen. (n.d.). <https://www.masshist.org/database/836>



(Figure 4.4)

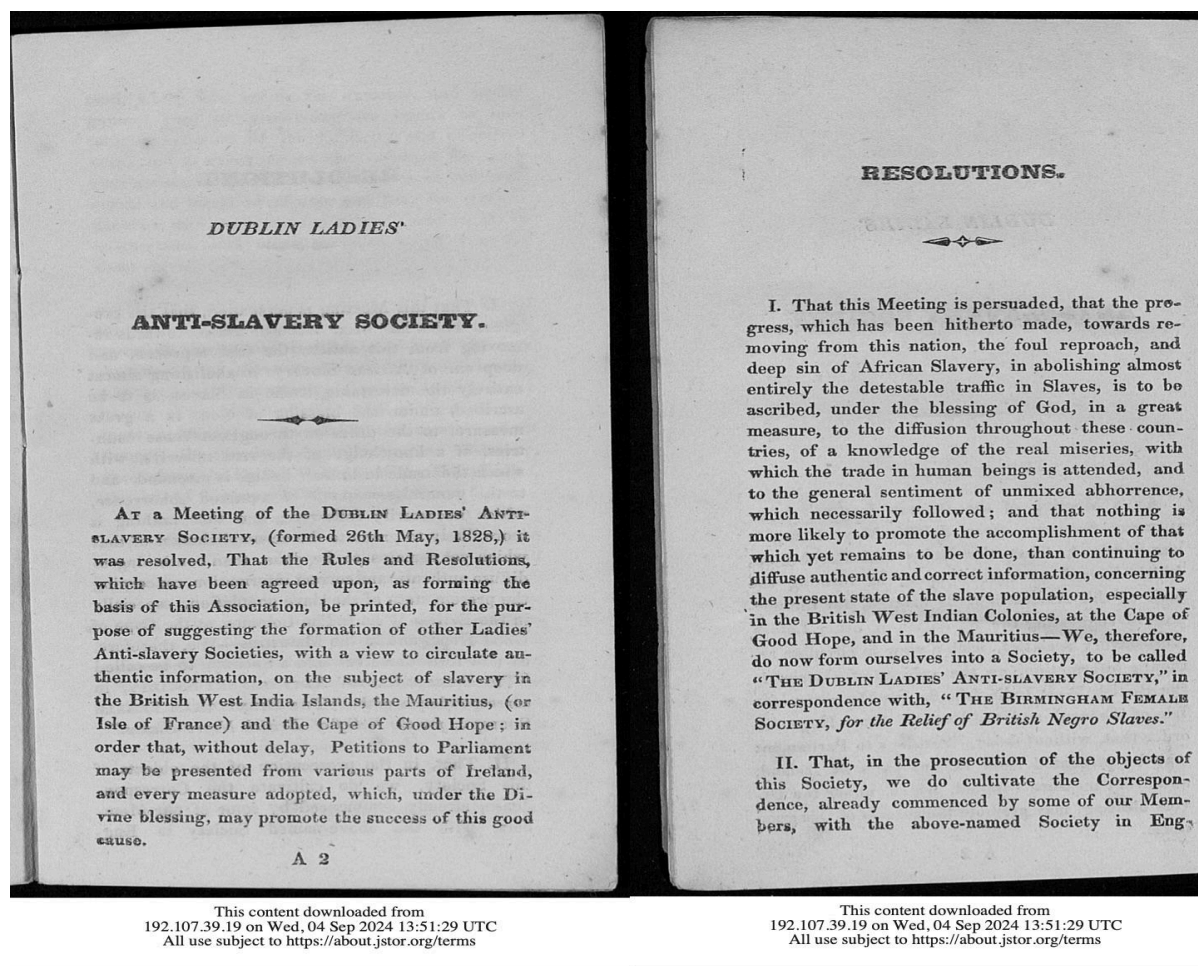
This portrait depicts Richard D. Webb, (1805-1872). From *Portraits of American Abolitionists* (a collection of images of individuals representing a broad spectrum of viewpoints in the slavery debate) Photo. 81.672¹¹³

¹¹³ "Richard D. Webb." Photograph. *Massachusetts Historical Society*, <https://www.masshist.org/database/1535> (accessed February 13, 2026).



(Figure 4.5)

Daguerreotype of James Haughton c. 1846. Artist unknown.

Figure 4.6¹¹⁴

Hannah Webb was the wife of Richard Webb, the co-founder of the Hibernian Anti-slavery Society (HASS). Richard's name is rarely mentioned without his wife's name in Christine Kinealy's book Black Abolitionists in Ireland. Even though the number of women Abolitionists exceeded that of men by the 1850s, societal constraints on women made it difficult

¹¹⁴ Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society. *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with Lists of the District Treasurers, Committee and Secretaries; and of the Subscribers*. Pamphlets. printed for the Society, by R. Napper, 1828. <https://jstor.org/stable/60238750>.

to bring attention to many women in the 19th century.¹¹⁵ But such conditions in a patriarchal society did not stop Abolitionists like Hannah Webb (figure 4.7), who welcomed many Abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, Charles and Sara Remond, William Lloyd Garrison, and others, into their homes. HASS was a beacon for inclusion and did not discriminate against its ideas based on gender or religion. Hannah Webb's commitment and participation in the Abolitionist movement are evident in her many letters to Abolitionists in America and Europe, in which she vehemently advocated and justified her position on equality and emancipation.¹¹⁶

Mary Anne McCracken was born an activist (see figure 4.8). She championed women's rights, social reform in Ireland, and abolitionism her whole life. Even after watching her brother, a member of the United Irishmen Society, Henry, hanged while she was still young, she always remained committed to reform; advocacy ran through her blood.¹¹⁷ Born into a middle-class Presbyterian family, Mary Anne McCracken attended a coeducational school. She was introduced to humanitarian engagement at a young age due to her parents' philanthropy and governance of the Poor House/Belfast Charitable Society, founded in 1752.¹¹⁸

As an original member of the Belfast Ladies Anti-slavery Association, McCracken was deeply concerned with abolishing the slave trade in England and divesting from the usage of goods that profited from slave labor. She was one of the few people who would navigate the

¹¹⁵ *History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian, Women in Congress, 1917–2006*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007. "The Women's Rights Movement, 1848–1917," <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/No-Lady/Continued-Challenges/> (February 07, 2026)

¹¹⁶ Webb, Hannah, and Maria Weston Chapman. "Letter from Hannah Webb, Dublin, [Ireland], to Maria Weston Chapman, 17th of 11th month 1845." Correspondence. Dublin, Ireland, November 17, 1845. *Digital Commonwealth*, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/7s75ds99q> (accessed September 06, 2024).

¹¹⁷ *Who was Mary Ann McCracken?* Mary Ann McCracken Foundation. (n.d.). <https://maryannmccrackenfoundation.org/who-was-mary-ann-mccracken/>

¹¹⁸ Ibid

Belfast piers, handing anti-slavery pamphlets to Irish emigrants traveling to the U.S., well into her 80s. Commenting on her heroism at the pier, she wrote in a letter to a friend: “Belfast, once so celebrated for its love of liberty, is now so sunk in the love of filthy lucre that there are but 16 or 17 female anti-slavery advocates and not one man though several Quakers ... and none to distribute papers to American emigrants but an old woman within 17 days of 89.”¹¹⁹

The impact of women in the abolitionist movement is enormous, yet many of their contributions have been minimized in history. Recognizing figures like Hannah Webb and Mary Anne McCracken is crucial because it highlights the vital roles women played, which often go unacknowledged. This brief summary doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of the information about the courageous women and the multiple obstacles they overcame in their fight for women's rights and emancipation. The lack of information on all but a few female Abolitionists, particularly in Ireland, is insulting, especially considering they constituted the majority of anti-slavery activists in the country. Christine Kinealy has done a magnificent job, with extensive research and documentation, of outlining several female Abolitionists' anti-slavery societies.

¹¹⁹ Strain, A. (2007, February 15). *UK | Northern Ireland | City threw out slavery plan*. BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/6366251.stm



(Figure 4.7)

“Glass image base is broken resulting in image loss and loss of painted background. Gift of the family of William L. Garrison, April 1, 1899.”¹²⁰

¹²⁰ "Richard and Hannah Webb with daughter, Annie Webb." Photograph. [ca. 1860]. *Digital Commonwealth*, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/2n49tn49j> (accessed February 14, 2026).



(Figure 4.8)

**Photograph of Mary Anne McCracken taken in Belfast (1857-1866).
Photographed by John Gibson.¹²¹**

¹²¹ *Photograph*. Explore our Collections. (n.d.).
<https://collections.nationalmuseumsni.org/object-belum-p475-1932>

Chapter 5: Past and Present

When we break the law we go to jail. When the government breaks the law, the government changes the law ~ Bernadette Devlin McAliskey¹²²

The 19th century was filled with troublesome periods for African Americans and Irish Catholics in Ireland, but it would eventually mark newer beginnings for these two communities as well. The end of slavery brought Jim Crow Laws from the late 19th century into the 20th century. The Irish Potato Famine reduced the population in Ireland by a third, with an estimated record of a million deaths and roughly one and a half million emigrating to North America as well as Great Britain and Australia.¹²³ The 20th century for Irish Catholics summoned a new enthusiasm among nationalists for independence, which was preceded by oppressive, draconian laws proposed to limit their rights, similar to how Jim Crow limited the freedoms of Blacks in America. The bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics didn't diminish after emancipation, and that bond tightened in the 20th century. The social parallels couldn't be more evident. While Chapter Four highlighted the relationship between African Americans and Irish Catholics abroad in the 19th century, Chapter Five emphasizes the connections between figures such as Marcus Garvey and Eamon de Valera-both leaders symbolizing transatlantic nationalist movements-and continues with the influence the Black Civil Rights Movement had on Northern Ireland's civil rights efforts, including the correspondence between the Black Panther Movement and Irish Republican Army members.

¹²²Spealian, R. (2023, August 7). *When Angela Davis met Bernadette Devlin*. Pluto Press. <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/when-angela-davis-met-bernadette-devlin/>

¹²³ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

In January of 1999, Coretta Scott King, the wife of the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., presented John Hume, an Irish civil rights activist and co-author of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, with the Martin Luther King Jr. Award. (see figure 5.1) In his acceptance speech, Hume discussed the parallels of the Civil Rights Movements in America and Northern Ireland, highlighting how the agreement marked a pivotal step toward peace and civil rights reconciliation, inspired by the nonviolent principles championed by Martin Luther King Jr., which continue to influence transatlantic civil rights efforts:

Martin Luther King embodies for me the commitment to the ideals of a true humanism based on loving not just your neighbours, but your enemies... The forces of history can often deal peace-makers a bad hand. In Northern Ireland, deep grievances about our history, about discrimination, lack of civil rights, and about social and economic marginalisation had entrenched divisions among people and bred a legitimate anger that boiled beneath the surface in the early 1960s. In my own beloved city of Derry, democratic wishes were set aside ritually in favour of the vested interests of those running the state. But the dream of equality, freedom and the dignity of the individual that Martin Luther King embodied helped shape the Northern Ireland civil rights movement that emerged during the closing years of the 1960's. Inspired and guided by the moral philosophy of non-violence espoused by Martin Luther King, I felt it my duty to help shape and guide the growing movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland and later the SDLP, the party I helped found as a vehicle for non-violent constitutional nationalism.¹²⁴

The transatlantic bond between African Americans and Irish Catholics in Ireland did not conclude with emancipation. In actuality, this bond strengthened after slavery in America and famine in Ireland due to the ethos of injustice and socio-economic brutality rearing its ugly head. The postbellum/famine era ushered in a call for women's civil liberties and voting rights, reinforcing a shared commitment to justice that continues to inspire.

¹²⁴ Hume, J. (n.d.). *Martin Luther King Award*. Acceptance Speech by Mr. John Hume. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/john_hume/docs/Hume_1999-01-18.pdf



(Figure 5.1)¹²⁵

The 20th century was marked by nationalism, liberation, and civil discourse for African Americans and Irish Catholics in Ireland. Yet, the parallel journeys for both Irish and Black Nationalism in the 1900s offered the opportunity for Blacks and Irish to strengthen a coalition between the two. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, which formed in 1858, was the ideological

¹²⁵ Meneely, G. (2020, August 3). *John Hume hailed as the Martin Luther King of the North's Peace process*. The US Sun. <https://www.the-sun.com/news/1247204/john-hume-dead-ireland-heroes-martin-luther-king/>

offspring of the United Irishmen.¹²⁶ Both organizations wanted to strive for “cultural nationality” at the expense of repealing political oppression spearheaded by the British Parliament.¹²⁷

While Blacks faced Jim Crow-era laws at the turn of the 20th century, Irish Catholics faced similar discriminatory laws inhibiting housing, voting, and political representation. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) became a leader of the Black Nationalist movement in the first quarter of the 20th century. At that same time, Eamon De Valera (1882-1975) symbolized Irish Nationalism in Ireland. In the United States, “Garvey established the first U.S. chapter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1917 in Harlem, and began publishing the *Negro World* newspaper.”¹²⁸ UNIA grew to more than four million members within two years and established a shipping company, the Black Star Line.¹²⁹

Garvey, while enamored with the 1916 Easter Uprising by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, hoped that Black people in the United States would exhibit the same enthusiasm for liberation by exercising the same strength against the oppressive government. Garvey named several UNIA headquarters after the destroyed headquarters of the Irish Transport & General Workers’ Union and the Irish Citizen Army in Dublin.¹³⁰ Eamon De Valera, who avoided execution for his role in the Easter Uprising through his American birth, would eventually become president of the political party Sinn Féin and subsequently lead the newly established Republic of Ireland several decades later. The two corresponded through telegrams and

¹²⁶ *Introduction to the Irish Republican Brotherhood*. IRB. (n.d.).

<https://irishrepublicanbrotherhood.ie/introduction-to-the-irish-republican-brotherhood/>

¹²⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, F., & McAliskey, B. D. (1994). *Ulster’s White Negroes*. AK Press.

¹²⁸ A&E Television Networks. (2009, November 9). *Marcus Garvey: Quotes, books & death*. History.com. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/marcus-garvey>

¹²⁹ Gavins, R. (2016). Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In *The Cambridge Guide to African American History* (pp. 284–284). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³⁰ Bassett, R. (2016b, December 1). *Marcus Garvey and 1916 | an Phoblacht*. anphoblacht. <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/26525>

messages, which caught the ire of national authorities in Britain and the United States. The close ties of nationalism sparked fear among government officials who worked diligently to sabotage Garvey's businesses.¹³¹ Garvey's solidarity with Irish Nationalists and Sinn Féin was further strengthened when he ordered Black dock workers to strike in support of Irish strikers who refused to load British vessels in New York until they released Terrence MacSwiney, an IRB member who was jailed after the 1916 Uprising.¹³² This gesture was significant, considering 55 years earlier marked the draft riots, where a group of Irish Americans rioted against Black residents in New York out of opposition to the Civil War draft, emancipation, and workers' competition.

The nationalist movements in Ireland and the United States gave rise to a Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland in the 1950s and 60s. Emulating the boycotts, sit-ins, and marches of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., organizations like the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) were established in Northern Ireland. Fionnbarra O'Dochartaigh, a civil rights pioneer in Northern Ireland, addresses the American civil rights influence in his book Ulster's White Negroes:

Many of us looked to civil rights struggles in America for our own inspiration. We compared ourselves to the poor blacks in the US ghettos and those suffering under the cruel system of apartheid in racist South Africa. Indeed we viewed ourselves as Ulster's white Negroes...¹³³

Marches were met with forceful resistance on both sides of the Atlantic; police used water hoses, pepper spray, and various scare tactics to subdue peaceful protestors in the US.^{134,135} Among the

¹³¹ Dooley, B. (1998). *Black and green: The fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*. Pluto Press.

¹³² Ibid, 24.

¹³³ Ó Dochartaigh, F., & McAliskey, B. D. (1994). *Ulster's White Negroes*. AK Press, p 14.

¹³⁴ Fitts, A. (2025, August 18). *Bloody Sunday*. Encyclopedia of Alabama. <https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/bloody-sunday/>

¹³⁵ Lunken, T. (2024, April 11). *Civil protest in Northern Ireland*. The Nonviolence Project.

many influences the United States' Civil Rights Movement had on the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland, the chants of "We Shall Overcome" definitely stand out as memorable, as they showed a sign of solidarity between the Irish and the African American parallel fight for freedom. The song "We Shall Overcome" became a civil rights anthem in both movements. Protesters marching with the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement sang the anthem while marching in Armagh and London.¹³⁶ "We Shall Overcome" (figure 5.2), evolved from the Negro Spiritual "I'll Be Alright Someday" (figure 5.3), and became a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement, highlighting its importance in social change. In 1900, Pastor Charles Tindley, a gospel composer born in 1851 to enslaved parents, adapted the spiritual in the gospel genre under the title "I'll Overcome Someday." (figure 5.4)¹³⁷ The song would later be adapted in 1945 as a protest anthem when Lucille Simmons modified its lyrics to "We Shall Overcome" during a strike by union members of the American Tobacco Company in Charleston, S.C., advocating for higher wages. Pete Seeger popularized the civil rights anthem in 1957 during a performance for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., cementing its role in the fight for equality.^{138,139} The evolution of Negro Spirituals is discussed in more detail in the following several chapters.

¹³⁶ *Civil Rights march in Armagh 1968*. YouTube. (n.d.).

<https://youtu.be/GiiXVskKrjw?si=bwip5HgTtiQr1RRr>

¹³⁷ Adams, N. (2013, August 28). *The Inspiring Force of "We Shall Overcome."* NPR.

<https://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome>

¹³⁸ Stewart, K. (2014, February 6). *Tracing the long journey of "We shall overcome": Folklife Today*. The Library of Congress.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/>

¹³⁹ Matthias, M. (2025, April 17). *We Shall Overcome*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/We-Shall-Overcome>

LIVING GOD'S STORY: Expanding Our Circle

803 We Shall Overcome

WE SHALL OVERCOME Irregular

C F C F C Am
We shall o - ver - come, we shall o - ver - come, we shall o - ver -

D G D7 G Refrain G7 C/E F C
come some - day! Oh, deep in my heart

F C Am Ddim C7 F C/G G7 C
I do be - lieve we shall o - ver - come some - day!

We'll walk hand in hand . . . some day!
 We shall live in peace . . . some day!
 We are not afraid . . . today!
 God will see us through . . . today!

Text: African American traditional (USA); adapts. Zilphia Horton (USA), Frank Hamilton (USA), Guy Carawan (USA), and Pete Seeger (USA); inspired by Charles Tindley, "I'll Overcome Some Day," 1900; members of the Food & Tobacco Workers Union, Charleston, South Carolina, and the civil rights movement in the American South (USA), 20th c.
 Music: African American traditional (USA); adapts. Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger

Figure 5.2

348. I'll Be Alright

Full Text

1 I'll be alright, I'll be alright,
I'll be alright some day.
O, O, if in my heart I do believe,
I'll be alright some day.

2 I'll wear a crown, I'll wear a crown,
I'll wear a crown some day.
O, O, if in my heart I do believe,
I'll wear a crown some day.

3 I'll see my Lord, I'll see my Lord,
I'll see my Lord some day.
O, O, if in my heart I do believe,
I'll see my Lord some day.

4 I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home some day.
O, O, if in my heart I do believe,
I'm going home some day.

Text Information

First Line: *I'll be alright, I'll be alright*
Title: I'll Be Alright
Meter: Irregular

Figure 5.3

No. 27. I'LL OVERCOME SOME DAY.
 C. A. T. "Ye shall overcome if ye faint not." C. ALBERT TINDLEY.

1. This world is one great bat - tle - field, With forc - es all ar - rayed;
 2. Both seen and un - seen pow - ers join To drive my soul a - stray,
 3. A thousand snares are set for me, And mountains in my way;
 4. I fail so oft - en when I try My Saviour to o - bey;
 5. My mind is not to do the wrong, But walk the nar - row way;
 6. Tho' many a time the signs ap - pear, Of an - swer when I pray;

If in my heart I do not yield, I'll o - vercome some day.
 But with his word a sword of mine, I'll o - vercome some day.
 If Je - sus will my lead - er be, I'll o - vercome some day.
 It pains my heart and then I cry, Lord, make me strong some day.
 I'm pray - ing as I jour - ney on, To o - vercome some day.
 My Je - sus says I need not fear, I'll be like him some day.

CHORUS.
 I'll o - vercome some day (some day), I'll o - vercome some day;

If in my heart I do not yield, I'll o - vercome some day.

Copyright, 1900, by Hall-Mack Co.

Figure 5.4

What began as a Spiritual sung among enslaved people to mitigate the trauma of slavery's abuses by singing a song of hope, ease, and promise, would evolve to become an anthem of freedom for their descendants less than 100 years after Emancipation and a symbol of hope—not

just in Northern Ireland but around the world. These “nonviolent” protests would eventually be followed by a revolutionary response to the physical anguish inflicted on nonviolent protesters by law enforcement. The Black Panther Party of Self-Defense (BPP) symbolized Black pride, armed self-defense, and political confrontation. At the same time, organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) represented the same in Ireland.

The Black Panther Party of Self-Defence was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, by Dr. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Their nationalist ideals of Black empowerment, they thought, could only be achieved by restricting hostile police officers from patrolling Black communities and investing in social welfare organizations, such as free daily meals for children, families, and older people.¹⁴⁰ The BPP took advantage of the gun laws in California and used the 2nd Amendment to their advantage by having armed marches and armed protests so that law enforcement figures who were reckless in their attempts to thwart advances of the civil rights protests decades earlier would be more cautious with their attempts to use the same brute force on the BPP.¹⁴¹ The primary objective of the movement and political party was to create fair opportunities for Black Americans to prosper socioeconomically across all facets of society.¹⁴² This may explain why the party stood in solidarity with liberation movements worldwide, including the Philippines, South Africa, Puerto Rico, South America, and Ireland. Ireland’s Liberation movements in the second half of the 20th century focused on the unification of

¹⁴⁰ Newton, H., Newton, F., & Anderson, H. (2009). *Revolutionary suicide (penguin classics deluxe edition)*. Penguin Publishing Group.

¹⁴¹ Dotson, N. (2026, January 20). “liberty and limits”: How the Black Panther Party impacted California’s gun control laws. KCRA.
<https://www.kcra.com/article/liberty-limits-black-panther-party-impact-california-gun-laws/69623049>

¹⁴² Newton, H., Newton, F., & Anderson, H. (2009). *Revolutionary suicide (penguin classics deluxe edition)*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Northern Ireland with the newly sovereign Republic of Ireland after the partition in 1922.¹⁴³

Several events in 1969 influenced this pivot in Northern Ireland: the Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 inspired Northern nationalists to march in 1968 and 1969. Police officials and agitators were allowed to beat marchers with clubs, hose them with water, and handle them aggressively; these actions led to more forceful rebellious resistance highlighted with riots and guerrilla warfare ensued marking 30 years (the 70s, 80s, 90s) in Northern Ireland known as the “Troubles.”¹⁴⁴

What Stokely Carmichael and Angela Davis were to the Black liberation movement, Bernadette Devlin MacAliskey was to the civil rights and nationalist movement in Northern Ireland. Devlin (Dev) was a civil rights leader who became the youngest member elected to Parliament in 1969 at 21 years old.¹⁴⁵ While attending Queen’s University in Belfast, she co-founded the People’s Democracy (1968), which was structured around the nonpartisan principle that everyone deserves the fundamental rights of essential freedom. McAliskey and other members of the People’s Democracy took part in the marches in ’68 and ’69.¹⁴⁶ She would become a recognized figure for civil rights at the Battle of Bogside,¹⁴⁷ where she described her ordeal to audiences in Ireland and the U.S. She would travel to raise awareness of the

¹⁴³ *Irish War of Independence*. National Army Museum. (n.d.).

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/irish-war-independence>

¹⁴⁴ Stewart, K. (2014, February 6). *Tracing the long journey of “We shall overcome”*: *Folklife Today*. The Library of Congress.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/>

¹⁴⁵ Devlin, B. (1973). *The price of My Soul bernadette devlin*. Pan Books.

¹⁴⁶ Moreton, C. (2008, October 5). Bernadette McAliskey: Return of the roaring girl. *The Independent*.

¹⁴⁷ Gallagher, B. (2025, August 12). *Aug. 12 1969 - Battle of the Bogside and Bernadette Devlin - The Troubles Begin*. Portland Hibernian Society.

<https://www.portlandhiberniansociety.org/blog/aug-12-1969-battle-of-the-bogside-and-bernadette-devlin-the-troubles-begin>

degradation Irish Catholics faced in Northern Ireland under British occupation.¹⁴⁸

Brian Dooley highlights in Black and Green that McAliskey's arrival in the U.S. in '69 was met with a mixed reaction from the Irish Community. She, like O'Connell more than 100 years before her, could not understand why the Irish-Catholic communities in America supported the Civil Rights Movement for Catholic Liberation in Northern Ireland but not the Civil Rights Movement for Blacks in America.¹⁴⁹

Devlin McAiskey wasted little time before highlighting this dilemma, which spoiled the support of many dioceses, yet grew her support among leaders of the Black Liberation movement and other organizations such as the NAACP, who'd routinely voiced their support and solidarity for the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland. McAliskey even went as far as to regift a key to the city she received from the New York City mayor in 1970 (see figure 5.5) and gave it to members of the Black Panther Party.¹⁵⁰

Devlin rejected the warning from the clergy and Irish organizations not to meet with Nationalist Liberation leaders during her visits in the 70s. She made an effort to visit leaders of the Black Panther Party and even visited Angela Davis, an affiliate of the Black Panther Party's Los Angeles chapter, in a California prison. In an interview with Dooley regarding her visits to the U.S., the author stated that "Devlin identified more readily with the young black radicals than

¹⁴⁸ Moreton, C. (2008, October 5). Bernadette McAliskey: Return of the roaring girl. *The Independent*.

¹⁴⁹ Dooley, B. (1998). *Black and green: The fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*. Pluto Press, pp. 90-92.

¹⁵⁰ The New York Times. (1970, March 3). *Irish give key to city to Panthers as symbol*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/03/archives/irish-give-key-to-city-to-panthers-as-symbol.html>

with Irish-Americans: he recalled her saying ‘There is a certain comfort, or comfortableness with black radicals that does not exist when you’re with what is supposed to be your own people.’¹⁵¹

Irish Give Key to City To Panthers as Symbol

A golden key to the city given by Mayor Lindsay to Bernadette Devlin, the Irish civil rights leader, was presented yesterday to the Black Panthers “as a gesture of solidarity with the black liberation and revolutionary socialist movements in America.”

The presentation was made by Eamon McCann, chairman of the Derry Labor Party, to Robert Bay, who identified himself only as a member of the Panthers, in a hired hall in a building at 853 Broadway, off Union Square.

Mr. McCann, who is associated with Miss Devlin, brought a mimeographed message that he said was from her. In the statement, Miss Devlin said she sympathized with Americans who are in slums, who are hated because they are black and despised because they are poor. She said, “To all these people, to whom this city and this country belong, I return what is rightfully theirs, this symbol of the freedom of New York.”

The New York Times

Published: March 3, 1970

Copyright © The New York Times

Figure 5.5

¹⁵¹ Dooley, B. (1998). *Black and green: The fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*. Pluto Press, pp. 90-92.

Chapter 6: Narratives of Grief and Misery

May there always be work for your hand to do
 May your purse always hold a coin or two,
 May the Sun always shine on your window pane
 May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain
 May the hand of a friend always be near you
 And may God will your heart with gladness to cheer you ~
 Traditional Irish blessing.¹⁵²

The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Organization currently monitors more than 110 armed conflicts worldwide.¹⁵³ These conflicts are prevalent in every hemisphere and have resulted in the deaths of millions. Two of the 110 conflicts seem to occupy the American psyche now: the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Gaza conflict. Even though these two humanitarian crises have taken much space in the media, American citizens are still conflicted about empathizing. Why? People often conceptualize conflict as having only two sides, but there is a third: innocent bystanders. The innocent are the forgotten men, women, and children who are killed, displaced, and injured in the conflicts of military powers that don't make enough of an—or any—attempt to shield the lives of the innocent on either side. Recognizing their suffering can evoke compassion and a sense of shared humanity, which is essential for fostering understanding and societal empathy. As a result, no one wins a war in the blank eyes of the forgotten; all that is left is grief.

One of the essential focuses of this dissertation is to highlight how society responds to conflict and grief and how it communicates these experiences to the world. This chapter will examine the causes of grief and explore how societies have historically used narratives to express

¹⁵² Unknown. (n.d.). *An Irish blessing*. Poet Seers.

<https://www.poetseers.org/the-great-poets/irish-poets/celtic-poems-2/celtic2/>

¹⁵³ *Galleries*. Home - The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. (n.d.).

their grievances. The following chapter will discuss the history of Negro Spirituals and Irish Famine Ballads and analyze the similarities in the traumatic grief expressed in their songs.

Grief is defined by the American Psychological Association as "the anguish experienced after significant loss, usually the death of a beloved person."¹⁵⁴ There are currently five identified stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.¹⁵⁵ This chapter will explore each of these stages and relate them to the experiences of enslaved Negroes and subjugated people during the Potato Famine, illustrating how music and history reflect societal responses to grief. Chapter 8 will analyze how these expressions are conveyed through spirituals and ballads, providing context for understanding societal mourning practices.

Denial is a stage of grief that typically occurs immediately after a traumatic event, such as death or violence. During this stage, individuals often adopt the "This isn't real" mentality as they attempt to process the reality of the loss. People may think life makes no sense, feel overwhelmed, and begin to deny the news, effectively going numb. This response can be observed in historical reactions to conflict and loss, highlighting how denial functions within societal grief processes.

"We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb."¹⁵⁶

Anger is a stage of grief that may elicit the strongest external emotions of all the stages. Being unable to ease the situation, you may become angry at yourself for not preventing the death of a loved one. You may be angry at God for allowing the event to happen. "The truth is that anger has no limits. This is a common stage to think, "Why me?" and "Life's not fair!" You might look to

¹⁵⁴ American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Grief*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>

¹⁵⁵ Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2014). *On grief & grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Scribner.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 10

blame others for the cause of your grief, and also may redirect your anger to close friends and family. You find it incomprehensible how something like this could happen to you.¹⁵⁷

Bargaining is the stage of grief where you may find yourself negotiating the situation that caused the suffering. "If I work overtime and learn how to cook, my wife will no longer want to divorce me." Or, "If I go to church more, maybe God won't let my father die." Bargaining is different from denial in that the shock or trauma is recognized, but we tend to think of it as changing the events out of our control. In contrast, denial is mentally restricting the traumatic incident from occurring. In bargaining, "[w]e want to go back in time: find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from...if only, if only."¹⁵⁸

Depression is the stage of grief where one may question the purpose of existence. Life becomes unbearable and meaningless after experiencing a traumatic event. We begin to question whether or not we can continue in life without this person, living in such despair, living without hope that things will get better: "The world might seem too much and too overwhelming for you to face. You don't want to be around others, don't feel like talking, and feel hopeless. You might even experience suicidal thoughts – thinking 'what's the point of going on?'"¹⁵⁹

The stages of grief in this thesis model the same sequence outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book On Grief & Grieving (2014); however, even Dr. Kübler-Ross points out that the stages are merely "...tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling," and that "...they are not tools on some linear timeline in grief."¹⁶⁰ This is why, although psychologists have

¹⁵⁷ *Are there stages of grief?*. Sue Ryder Main Website. (n.d.).

<https://www.sueryder.org/grief-support/about-bereavement-and-grief/stages-of-grief/>

¹⁵⁸ Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2014). *On grief & grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Scribner, p 17.

¹⁵⁹ Gregory, C. (2023, July 20). *Five stages of grief: An overview*. Spokane Christian Counseling. <https://spokanechristiancounseling.com/articles/five-stages-of-grief-an-overview>

¹⁶⁰ Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2014). *On grief & grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*.

universally accepted the stages as primarily unfolding in order from Denial to Acceptance, I did not categorize each stage by sequence. (To note: since the publication of Kübler-Ross' book On Grief & Grieving, many authors have recategorized the stages into 6, 8, and even 12 stages.¹⁶¹) With that being said, it is a comfortable assessment to acknowledge Acceptance as the final stage of grief, because if you have not come to terms with the situation, you are still experiencing any or all of the other four stages. Acceptance occurs when you understand what has happened, and now it is time to figure out how to continue with your life.

The emotions of grief, as mentioned above, may not always transpire linearly for victims of slavery and famine. The emotional paradox felt by victims in constant shock or trauma may resemble a multitude of emotions and stages at once, or may never pass certain stages based on the severity of their trauma. As such, grief looks different for everyone.

The second part of this chapter will analyze the grief and mourning of enslaved people and famine victims. It establishes a proper exposition of the traumatic events people endured in slavery and the Irish Famine, lending credence to the sorrowful melodies heard in the songs produced in that era. To grieve is to be in a state of emotional mourning or sorrow.^{162,163} Loved ones may die. Divorces occur. Tragedy may strike. However, for those individuals who are constantly in fear for their life, as the case with children in war-torn Sudan, Ukraine, and Gaza, or the thousands of women lured or taken into sex trafficking, and the millions of starving children around the world,

¹⁶¹ Aasen, A. S. (2025, April 21). *Understanding the 12 stages of grief: A journey through loss and healing*. Anita Aasen. <https://anitasalekaasen.com/12-stages-of-grief/>

¹⁶² Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Grieve definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grieve>

¹⁶³ Aldabbour, B., Abuabada, A., Lahlouh, A., Halimy, M., Elamassie, S., Sammour, A. A.-K., Skaik, A., & Nadarajah, S. (2024, November 26). *Psychological impacts of the Gaza War on palestinian young adults: A cross-sectional study of depression, anxiety, stress, and PTSD symptoms*. BMC psychology. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11600870/>

there are very few stages to transition between.^{164,165} Their state of constant grief stretches beyond the canon of psychological taxonomy into a deep state of misery. Depression is the paramount emotion to indicate when someone is grieving. Since this section of the thesis focuses on the emotional bond between Blacks and Irish Catholics during subjugation, my objective for this chapter was to identify commonalities in the grief and misery endured by both.

While researching narratives, journals, oral stories, folktales, ballads, and letters passed down by survivors, descendants of survivors, and victims of slavery and the Potato Famine, two common crises were identified that led to grief on both sides of the Atlantic. The loss and separation of family members are horrific, yet everyday, experiences endured by enslaved people and famine victims.

But First, How Did We Get Here?

I didn't grow up in a religious household. On the other hand, my grandparents (on both sides) would often invite the pastor to their homes on some Sundays to have a service. So, at a young age, I was introduced to chants, singing, and rituals familiar in many Black Churches through these visits. When I was around 15, I tried to convert to Islam. I learned the prayers, procedures, and commonalities typical of Islamic traditions for years. But something always felt off. It had nothing to do with how one religion identifies God or beliefs. The chants, praises, and rituals I would later discover, which I thought were indicative of Christianity, were ultimately representative of a deep Black cultural presence that extended, in my opinion, beyond Christianity

¹⁶⁴ Frolova, N., & Silver, R. C. (2024, June 10). *A sudden but prolonged collective trauma: The Ukrainian experience*. PLOS Mental Health.

<https://journals.plos.org/mentalhealth/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pmen.0000056>

¹⁶⁵ Saleh, E., et. al. (2024). Health and Humanitarian Toll of Sudan's Forgotten War. *The Lancet*, 404(10461), 1383–1385. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(24\)01939-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(24)01939-1)

and spoke to the “Soul” of Black people. One of the mechanisms embedded in early Celtic Christianity was its ability to adapt or codify many of the rituals and pagan festivals that preceded it, which appealed to converts. This can explain why Christianity (as well as Islam) can look significantly different depending on the region where it’s observed. This is significant as it pertains to Christianity, particularly Catholicism, in the context of Ireland. “Catholic monks recorded these Irish mythological stories, altering the oral histories to reflect Roman Catholic teachings. Over time, Catholicism adopted ancient Irish mythology into clerical teachings, and Ireland became one of the most fiercely Catholic countries in the world.”¹⁶⁶ “Even as The Blight^{167,168} hit the land, many of the Irish people attributed the poisoning of the potatoes to “...the different fairy tribes battling over the potatoes.”¹⁶⁹

The evolution of Catholicism on the Emerald Isle is significant. After the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Protestants and Catholics fought numerous battles for territorial influence, partly due to differences in religious doctrine but chiefly over political and economic control. A secondary reason was the financial support provided to the church. If a territory or country were Roman Catholic, the Vatican would receive a substantial portion of the tithes, allowing church leaders to "bless" Catholic politicians and exert religious influence over the

¹⁶⁶ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹⁶⁷ The Great Famine, also referred to as The Irish Potato Famine, An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger), lasted from 1845 to 1849. The direct cause of the blight or crop failure was a water mold, scientifically known as [*Phytophthora infestans*](#), which destroyed the edible roots of the potato plant.

¹⁶⁸ Mokyř, J. (2026, February 6). Great Famine. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history>

¹⁶⁹ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

territory. Protestant tithes, however, would greatly benefit the Anglican Church and would thus trickle their way into the pockets of the Parliament for influence.¹⁷⁰

After the Orange Wars (1600s), England gained nearly full control of Ireland and began restricting the rights of Irish Catholics through the Penal Laws (1690s).¹⁷¹ These laws restricted land ownership, ability to own cattle, parliamentary voting and representation, educational and professional opportunities, and more to Protestants, who were encouraged to establish homes in Ireland over the next 200 years.¹⁷² As a result of these Penal Laws, the Irish Catholics (also referred to as the Irish Gaelic, Native Irish) lost their property and became increasingly dependent on the English government for work, assistance, and daily necessities whenever there was any type of crisis. Agriculture and farming reached a point where the Native Irish depended on Protestant landlords, many of whom still resided in England, to rent plots of land. Due to the agriculture and farming restrictions, high taxes, and the industrial decline of the 1820s, Ireland's dependence on the potato to be a primary source (and for three million Irish, nearly the only source) of nourishment ensued.¹⁷³ There are many cases where a family member would convert to Protestantism and assume control over their family's land so that their loved ones (who remained Catholic) would continue to dwell in their homes. However, as mentioned at the onset of this section, being Catholic in Ireland was not just about making the sign of the cross; it was about national identity and remaining true to the Celtic and pre-Christian principles embedded in Irish

¹⁷⁰ Bric, Maurice J. "The Tithe System in Eighteenth-Century Ireland." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 86C (1986): 271–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25506142>.

¹⁷¹ *Irish penal law - statutes in chronological order*. Statutes in Chronological Order - THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE | Irish Penal Laws. (n.d.). <https://librarycollections.law.umn.edu/irishlaws/chron-anne.html>

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Catholicism, which had been present in Ireland centuries before the birth of Christ. How many soldiers would bargain their freedoms in exchange for renouncing the U.S. flag? How many enslaved people would deny their blackness to be free? Thus, how many Irish Catholics would renounce their doctrine to assimilate into the colonizer's realm for a plot of land?

The Irish faced land theft and cattle restrictions that deprived them of income, forcing many into high rent, living in huts, and relying on potatoes as their main source of nourishment.¹⁷⁴ Then came a series of famines, culminating in the Great Famine from 1845-1852, which immeasurably worsened their plight and highlighted the severity of land loss and economic hardship.

The descent into servitude for the American Negro isn't wholly dissimilar from that of the Irish Catholic. Africans who arrived in Jamestown and other colonies later in 1619 were allowed to complete their indentured servitude contracts, purchase land, and acquire indentured servants after fulfilling their own work contracts.¹⁷⁵ Towards the end of the 17th century, laws were enacted to impose further restrictions on Black people. By 1709, the Virginia state constitution specified that all persons of African descent were property, without rights, and destined to spend the rest of their lives in chattel slavery. Both the Irish Catholic and African Americans can point to a time in history when they owned land, amassed wealth, and enjoyed fundamental freedoms accorded to other humans of like stature before subjugation. Both groups of people can point to a time in history when they had it all stripped away by the English government (up until 1776).

¹⁷⁴ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹⁷⁵ Wolfe, B. (2025, February 13). *Indentured servants in Colonial Virginia*. Encyclopedia Virginia. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/indentured-servants-in-colonial-virginia/>

Connecting through loss

Grief occurs when a traumatic event or events transpire, altering a person's livelihood to the point that their daily activities become unbearable to continue. When such traumatic events are incidents such as the death of a loved one, rape, separation, injury, loss of home, etc., a person may go through a litany of emotions ranging from denial, anger, and depression to deal with their pain. However, many overcome such grief because time and persistence can sometimes allow one to distance oneself from the event that initially caused the shock. Yet for those who are enslaved, oppressed, and subjugated, traumatic events are constantly transpiring, spiraling the person into a constant state of grief and misery.

A mother's greatest fear is the harm to her children, whereas for women without children, their greatest fear is the harm to themselves or their livelihood.¹⁷⁶ These fears persist today, as they have for centuries. Therefore, connecting the grief precipitated from the sufferings of slaves and famine victims acts as a medium to develop an empathic relationship between Blacks and Irish people over the most unfortunate of circumstances. African Americans under the chattel slave system and Irish Catholics facing poverty and famine all confronted such misery. In slavery, children were routinely separated from their mothers through force or death.

The Potato Famine decimated the Irish family: an island that nearly peaked at 8.1 million in the very first census of 1841 (and still has not yet reached that population again almost 200 years later) was almost halved in just 10 years.¹⁷⁷ It's estimated that the death toll from The Potato Famine and related disease reached one million. At the same time, another million and a half

¹⁷⁶ Shiffman, K. (2017b, October 27). *New survey reveals parents' biggest fears - today's parent.* Today's Parent.

<https://www.todayparent.com/blogs/trending/new-survey-reveals-parents-biggest-fears/>

¹⁷⁷ Powderly, W. G. (2019). *How infection shaped history: Lessons from the irish famine.* Transactions of the American Clinical and Climatological Association.

emigrated to America, the West Indies, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia through forced penal subjugation or merely to escape the treacherous conditions in Ireland.¹⁷⁸ Mothers too weak to care for their children scoured the green fields in search of sustenance so that they could nurse their young. Children too weak to stand were left helpless in shacks while their mothers or fathers tried their best to look for work or food. On many occasions, the children died alongside their parents as they withered beside the corpses of the dead.¹⁷⁹ Whether in death or emigration, separating from your parents or children can be one of the most devastating events in a person's life.

Black families in slavery endured profound hardship, with many feeling the pain of being separated from loved ones. Slave marriages were not recognized according to the Constitution and were even shunned. Children were often stolen away from the grasp of their mothers at an early age, while husbands and wives were not only sold at auctions but also consistently dehumanized through rape and torture.¹⁸⁰ Former slave John Brown (also known by his enslaved name of 'Fed') who escaped several plantations in his lifetime, eventually to settle in England for the remainder of his life, remembers in his narrative: *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England*, being hurried on a wagon at the age of ten, out of close distance from his mother, who tried frantically to grasp¹⁸¹ her son one last time as she watched her being taken to his new master. The grief of the loss of a child produces an unbearable misery too common in slavery and the Irish Famine. As parents, we assume the role of protector. Still, we are overcome with sorrow and humiliation, knowing that we cannot protect our children in the most treacherous of circumstances such as forced separation (figure 6.1 depicts an

¹⁷⁸ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black Potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Feinstein, R. A. (2019). *When rape was legal: The untold history of sexual violence during slavery*. Routledge.

¹⁸¹ Brown, J., & Boney, F. N. (1991). *Slave life in Georgia: A narrative of the life, sufferings, and escape of John Brown, a fugitive slave*. Beehive Press.

advertisement for the sale of the enslaved property of John Carter, who wanted to “liquidate his assets” before moving to the free state of Indiana).¹⁸² There are stories of mothers on both sides of the Atlantic who opted to end the lives of their children rather than have them endure the misery of slavery or famine.^{183,184}

In addition to the agony of family separation, victims of slavery and the Famine faced sexual exploitation as well. In Ireland, as many as 4000 girls from Irish orphanages or workhouses were sponsored by the Australian government to emigrate to the continent to help with the gender imbalance Australia was experiencing at the time.¹⁸⁵ It's important to note that many women and girls as young as fifteen (and younger) welcomed the opportunity to escape for the new land of opportunity. However, remember that the conditions that befell them in the first place were caused by restrictive laws that forced their families' descent into poverty. Landlords in Ireland took advantage of impoverished tenants through sexual exploitation. Female tenants often found themselves in peculiar circumstances where sex was the only commodity in place of the income needed for rent. "On some estates, proprietors also demanded sexual services."¹⁸⁶

The sexual exploitation of enslaved women was legal and rampant. Harriet Jacobs documents salacious grooming by her master before she turned 15 in her narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Jacob's grotesque accounts of being sodomized and witnessing the theft of innocence of other slave children broke a dam of suppressed emotions upon its release that

¹⁸² *John Carter Great Sale of Slaves*. Slaves for sale. (n.d.). <https://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6729>

¹⁸³ Age of Revolutions. (2022, July 31). “she had smothered her baby on purpose”: *Enslaved women and maternal resistance*.

¹⁸⁴ Bartoletti, S. C. (2014). *Black potatoes. the story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹⁸⁵ Moran, Dr. G., (2020, August 17). *Galway and the Female Orphan Scheme to Australia: The Sydney Famine Memorial*. Galway County Heritage Office.

¹⁸⁶ Kelly, J. (2013). *The graves are walking: The great famine and the saga of the Irish people*. Picador.

encouraged many formerly enslaved people to talk about similar egregious transactions, which had been taboo to discuss prior.¹⁸⁷

This chapter was challenging to write. Reading and listening to formerly enslaved people and famine victims recall their experiences through recordings or audio reenactments elicited such inconsolable sorrow that was truly haunting. Sexual exploitation and family separation are mechanisms of the oppressor to execute his dominance over the oppressed; a tool not only used in the American South and 19th century Ireland but across all cultures and many countries, from the Rape of Nanking by the Japanese army in World War II to the separation of asylum-seeking South American migrants in the 21st century.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Jacobs, H. A., Foster, F. S., & Yarborough, R. (2019). *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: Authoritative text, contexts, criticism*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.


¹⁸⁸ *US records show physical, sexual abuse at border*. Human Rights Watch. (2023, August 2). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/21/us-records-show-physical-sexual-abuse-border#:~:text=Newly%20obtained%20United%20States%20government%20documents%20detail%20over%20160%20internal>

GREAT SALE

of

SLAVES

JANUARY 10, 1855


HERE Will Be Offered For Sale at Public Auction at the SLAVE MARKET, CHEAPSIDE, LEXINGTON, All The SLAVES of JOHN CARTER, Esquire, of LEWIS COUNTY, KY., On Account of His Removal to Indiana, a Free State. The Slaves Listed Below Were All Raised on the CARTER PLANTATION at QUICK'S RUN, Lewis County, Kentucky.

3 Bucks Aged from 20 to 26, Strong, Ablebodied
1 Wench, Sallie, Aged 42, Excellent Cook
1 Wench, Lize, Aged 23 with 6 mo. old Picinniny
One Buck Aged 52, good Kennel Man
17 Bucks Aged from twelve to twenty, Excellent

TERMS: Strictly CASH at Sale, as owner must realize cash, owing to his removal to West. Offers for the entire lot will be entertained previous to sale by addressing the undersigned.

JOHN CARTER, Esq.
 Po. Clarksburg Lewis County, Kentucky

Figure 6.1 Source: John Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (1940).

Chapter 7: Singing from the Grave: Identifying grief and misery in Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads

So for me music was therapy, it was also the place where one could speak about himself, where he was allowed to speak about his traumatic experiences. ~ Sinead O'Connor.¹⁸⁹

Music encompasses nearly every facet of our lives; from weddings to funerals, music can be observed on every occasion. "While different definitions exist, they all highlight the fundamental idea that music is an art form capable of eliciting profound emotional responses."¹⁹⁰

Humans and animals have used creative expressions, directly or indirectly, to articulate their happiness, sorrow, joy, grief, and misery for thousands of years. Male puffer fish construct underwater 'crop circles' to attract female mates. "First, they involve radially aligned ridges and valleys outside the nest site. Second, the male decorates these ridges with shell fragments. Third, the male gathers fine sediments to give the resulting formation a distinctive look and coloring..."¹⁹¹ Elephants have been observed visiting the graves of the deceased and performing a ritual-like sway from side to side while positioned in a circle around the bones of the fallen.¹⁹² Evolutionary Thanatology is a growing field in research that measures how "societies, including those of humans, have evolved multiple ways of dealing with death across changing circumstances and pressures...by adopting an explicit evolutionary stance for studies of death and dying within

¹⁸⁹ Palmieri, D. G. (2012, October 2). *The psychiatrist & the rockstar: Interview with Sinead O'Connor*. State of Mind. <https://www.stateofmind.it/2012/10/sinead-oconnor-interview/>

¹⁹⁰ Steen, A. (2024, August 17). *What is music? - definition, history, types, and benefits*. Prime Sound. <https://primesound.org/what-is-music/>

¹⁹¹ Cormier, Z. (n.d.). *The truth about animal grief*. BBC Earth. <https://www.bbcearth.com/news/the-truth-about-animal-grief>

¹⁹² Ibid

the sociological, psychological and biological disciplines.”¹⁹³ How human beings mourn and manifest their grief fascinates historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and researchers alike. Wilfred Owen recorded the dismal circumstances of the Great War in poetry. Vincent van Gogh and Frida Kahlo expressed their grief through art.

Though many creative outlets have been utilized over time, accessing music, wailing, and chants to express grief has been observed for millennia.¹⁹⁴ “Ndodemnyama” became an Urban Anthem against South African Apartheid in the 50s and 60s. Musicologist Dr. Tamara Freeman explores the music composed by Holocaust victims in her dissertation, emphasizing the importance of incorporating the melodic experiences of Holocaust survivors of WWII into K-12 academic programs on Holocaust and Genocide studies.¹⁹⁵

In the previous chapter we analyzed grief and misery through narratives of victims who endured slavery and the Great Famine. This chapter will analyze the songs and ballads of the victims and highlight the connections between spirituals and ballads as it pertains to the grief and misery endured during this calamity of oppression.

Close examinations of the songs of several Negro Spirituals sung on plantations during slavery and songs, letters, and ballads of the victims of the Irish Potato Famine, also referred to as An Gorta Mor (The Great Hunger), form the foundation of this work. The comparison is necessary

¹⁹³ Anderson James R., Biro Dora and Pettitt Paul
2018 Evolutionary thanatology *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 373:20170262
<http://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0262>

¹⁹⁴ O'Callaghan, Clare, and Natasha Michael, 'Music Therapy in Grief and Mourning', in Jane Edwards (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Therapy*, Oxford Library of Psychology (2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 4 Mar. 2015),
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199639755.013.42>, accessed 17 Nov. 2024.

¹⁹⁵ Freeman, T. R. (2007). *Using Holocaust music to encourage racial respect: An interdisciplinary curriculum for grades K-12* (dissertation). *Using Holocaust music to encourage racial respect: an interdisciplinary curriculum for grades K-12*. Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

to highlight how the struggles endured by one community can mirror those of others. This section will focus on how this research documents the "Grief Songs" of civilizations worldwide.

Music to convey Grief and Mourning

To conceptualize the full import of singing and music in human existence, we must understand their historical significance pertaining to spirituals and ballads. The Middle East is an extraordinary example of the importance of music in Jewish, Arabic, and Christian rituals,¹⁹⁶ as singing is heard in conjunction with prayer, celebrations, and mourning. "Music has been associated with the healing of grief for many centuries, with Homer prescribing music as an antidote to sorrow as early as the 7th century B.C. The changing role of music in expressions of grief and mourning throughout history and in different cultures reflects the changing attitudes of society towards life and death itself."¹⁹⁷

History of Spirituals and Ballads

Negro Spirituals were songs developed by enslaved African-Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁹⁸ Africans who were transported to America in the 17th and 18th centuries were forced (according to colonial law) to attend church services or have church service on the plantation. The ministers (most were of Protestant denominations) introduced Anglican hymnals to enslaved people. Over the years, Africans and African Americans began to combine "Old World" rhymes

¹⁹⁶ Amir, D. (1997). Understanding the Role of Folk Songs in Jewish-Israeli Culture: Implications for Music Therapy. *The World of Music*, 39(1), 111–127.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41699133>

¹⁹⁷ Davidson, J., & Garrido, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Music and mourning* (1st ed.). Routledge.

¹⁹⁸ Johnson, J. W., Johnson, J. R., & Brown, L. (2003). *The books of American negro spirituals: Including The book of american negro spirituals and the second book of Negro Spirituals*. DaCapo.

such as chants, tones, beats, and call-and-response techniques to create spirituals that contained biblical elements of the Anglican hymnals but exemplified the social conditions of enslaved peoples.¹⁹⁹ Spirituals can often be referred to as field songs, folk songs, slave songs, and chants. All have similarities; however, each can demonstrate distinctive characteristics based on the region sung and their purpose. Field songs and slave songs had multiple meanings. They developed as a mechanism for conveying secret codes that relay escape routes, as in “Still Away” and “Wade in the Water.” Jubilee songs, in contrast, consisted of spirituals, which were more upbeat to increase work camaraderie. They, at times, provided a spiritual reprieve from the tediousness of labor and established a sense of community and pride; this was often exhibited while singing songs representing biblical triumphs, such as “Go Down Moses” and “Roll Jordan Roll.”^{200,201} This dissertation, however, will focus on Spiritual significance as relaying the historical depictions of brutality and grief of familial sundering in chattel slavery.²⁰²

Famine songs consist of a collection of ballads, either written in poems, letters, songs, or vocalized between people directly and indirectly affected by the Irish Potato Famine from 1845 to 1852. These songs detail the pains, sacrifices, defeats, and triumphs of the Irish people as they struggled to retain their homes, farms, and livelihood while living under the deplorable British authority whose laws and restrictions were the direct cause of mass death and emigration, both during and after the years of the Great Famine.²⁰³ The second section of the chapter will examine

¹⁹⁹ Johnson, J. W., Johnson, J. R., & Brown, L. (2003). *The books of American negro spirituals: Including The book of american negro spirituals and the second book of Negro Spirituals*. DaCapo.

²⁰⁰ *History of folk spiritual*. Timeline of African American Music. (n.d.).
<https://timeline.carnegiehall.org/genres/folk-spiritual>

²⁰¹ *Work song, Field Call & More*. Timeline of African American Music. (n.d.-b).
<https://timeline.carnegiehall.org/genres/work-songs-field-street-calls-satirical-protest-songs>

²⁰² Ibid

²⁰³ Gribben, A., & O’Hallmhair, G. (1999). *The Great Famine and the Irish diaspora in America*. University of Massachusetts Press.

the historical significance of Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads to encapsulate the tragic grief of its victims through music and analyze their parallels in terms of structure, experience, and detail.

Comparing the Ballads of Misery

The grief and misery caused by chattel slavery and the Great Famine were catastrophic. Ireland's population decreased by nearly 40% due to death from disease, starvation, and emigration. Millions of African captives brought to Americas between the 15th and 19th century,²⁰⁴ resulting in the deaths of more than four million Africans, with millions dying en route to America.²⁰⁵ The brutality endured by both Africans and Irish Catholics at the hands of the British Empire (and its subsidiaries) caused irreversible trauma that would be felt and passed down for generations. Negroes faced constant abuse from mutilation, rape, and flogging, as well as physical and verbal abuse from enslavers. Irish tenant farmers in the 19th century also faced dehumanization at the hands of landlords and government officials.

The previous chapter analyzed the narratives and personal accounts of chattel enslaved people and famine victims to illustrate the similarities in grief and misery from death, hunger, brutality, and family separation (especially as it pertains to children being separated from their parents). This chapter will explore several songs, spirituals, and ballads sung by victims of chattel slavery and the Potato Famine (there were numerous famines in the 19th century of which An Gorta Mor was only the worst, the last occurring in 1879-80), which further emphasize the misery and grief that accompany the loss and separation of family. The Negro Spirituals "Motherless Child," "Many Thousands Gone," and "Lord, How Come Me Here?" will be measured alongside the Ballads "Skibbereen" and "The Praties They Grow Small" and the contemporary ballad,

²⁰⁴ Lewis, T. (2026, February 6). transatlantic slave trade. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

“Kilkelly” (a contemporary ballad composed in the 20th century based on letter exchanges of two Great Famine survivors), to analyze similarities in grief caused by death and family separation due to famine and subjugation.

The first performance of the Negro Spiritual “Motherless Child” was by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1870, and one of the first documented scripts of the Spiritual (one version) was by William Barton, who reported on the songs sung in fields by formerly enslaved people in the South during his years of residency from 1880 to 1887.²⁰⁶ The Fisk Jubilee Singers (FJS) choir is one of the oldest African American Choirs in American history. Incorporated in 1871, the choir's early years involved touring Europe and the U.S. to raise money for its financially strained college of Fisk University. The choir, which consisted of several formerly enslaved people, introduced the world to spirituals. However, singers had been reluctant to sing spirituals at first, at a time when minstrel and stage buffoonery for Blacks were common.^{207,208,209}

“Motherless Child” embodies the depth of despair caused by family separation, aiming to evoke empathy for those who endured this pain. Harriet Jacobs and John Brown detail the constant, forceful separation of mothers from children and husbands from wives in their narratives. Figure 6.1 is an advertisement in a Kentucky newspaper from John Carter Esq., announcing the auctioning of enslaved persons as young as twelve. Advertisements like these paint a horrible picture of human beings forcibly separated from their families and sold by slave traders and

²⁰⁶ Barton, W. E. (1972). *Old plantation hymns: A collection of hitherto unpublished melodies of the slave and the Freedman, with historical and descriptive notes*. Lamson, Wolffe.

²⁰⁷ I strongly recommend that the reader do an internet search or travel to see the choir perform; many of the Spirituals performed have the genuine elements of Negro Spirituals sung during slavery that have been passed down through generations

²⁰⁸ *Timeline*. Fisk Jubilee Singers. (2022, September 14).
<https://fiskjubileesingers.org/about-the-singers-2/fisk-timeline/>

²⁰⁹ Editors, H. (2024, August 2). *Fisk University's jubilee singers have a history worth praising*. HBCU Buzz.
<https://hbcubuzz.com/70003/fisk-universitys-jubilee-singers-have-a-history-worth-praising/>

masters. “Like most [S]pirituals, its origin is one of unimaginable pain. You are having your babies pulled violently away from you and sold to another, and being removed from your father’s lands to be enslaved and abused for the rest of your days. To live in Hell on Earth. In these losses, however, rest seeds of hope.”²¹⁰ The first stanza in the Spiritual arrangement consists of the thrice repetition of the bar *Sometimes, I feel like a Motherless child*, followed by the verse *A long way from home*, which is repeated twice. The following stanza repeats the sentence *Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone*, sung three times before repeating the sentence *A Long Way from Home* twice more. (See figure 7.1)

²¹⁰ Pants, S., Pants, S., 23, A. N., 23, M. H. P. authorNovember, 23, M. N., 24, M. H. P. authorNovember, 24, P. N., 25, A. N., & 25, M. H. P. authorNovember. (2016, March 21). *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*. Washerman’s Dog. <https://wdajabi.wordpress.com/2013/11/23/sometimes-i-feel-like-a-motherless-child/>

88B Spiritual: Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child



1 Some - times I feel like a moth - er - less child.
2 Some - times I feel like I'm al - most gone.



Some - times I feel like a moth - er - less child.
Some - times I feel like I'm al - most gone.



Some - times I feel like a moth - er - less child, a
Some - times I feel like I'm al - most gone, a



long ways from home, a long ways from home.
long ways from home, a long ways from home.

Words: Afro-American spiritual
Music (MOTHERLESS CHILD): Afro-American spiritual

1 Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
a long ways from home, a long ways from home.

2 Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone.
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone.
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
a long ways from home, a long ways from home.

Source: [Psalms for All Seasons: a complete Psalter for worship #88B](#)

Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

Voice 1:

¹ I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever,
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

² I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

³ You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴ "I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations." "

Selah

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

540

Figure 7.1

“Motherless Child” has been visually and vocally represented by various artists hundreds of times, from Paul Robeson (1926) to John Legend (2010). In author C. Jones’ review of “Motherless Child” in Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals, his analysis leads him to believe that there were days of mourning and days where the singer wasn’t in mourning: “the repetition of the word ‘sometimes’ offers a measure of hope, as it suggests that at least ‘sometimes’ the singer *does not* feel like a motherless child.”²¹¹ I do not concur with this assessment. Several spirituals mention the term ‘Sometimes,’ many of which detail contrasting emotions. In the Spiritual “Nobody Knows the Troubles” the lyrics *Sometimes I’m up, sometimes I’m down. Oh yes, Lord. Sometimes I’m almost to the ground. Oh yes, Lord*, are a contrast sharing the singer’s emotion of being *Up*, with *down* with *to the ground* telling the listener which emotions the singer is experiencing at a given moment. “Motherless Child” conveys the same contrast but not in the same verse. *Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child* and *Sometimes I feel like I’m almost gone*. When you analyze this version with several other versions of the Spiritual, you can also contrast the prior verses with *Sometimes I feel like a feather in the air*, and *sometimes I feel Like I haven’t got a friend* and the chorus *long, long, I know my time ain’t long* replacing the *a long ways from home* chorus section in the more traditionally recognized version of the spiritual, as represented in the version sung by women prisoners Florida’s Raiford penitentiary 1939.²¹² This is not to say that there weren’t occasions when singers would experience some joy or pleasure in the company of colleagues during Sunday service or other occasions, but experiencing reprieve while dealing with constant grief doesn’t necessarily invalidate despair.

²¹¹ Jones, A. C. (n.d.). Sweet Chariot: The story of the spirituals.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070109153246/http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/Survival/>

²¹² Lomax, J. (Ed.). (n.d.). *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*. The Library of Congress. [Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child | Library of Congress](#)

Marian Anderson, who sang “Motherless Child” at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, is still considered one of the most gifted voices in opera history, and faced constant racism and oppression.²¹³ Her grief and tribulations enhance the personification and remarkability of her performances. One does not have to be a music connoisseur to emotionally conceptualize the misery portrayed in her voice while singing “Motherless Child”.

The overarching analyses of “Motherless Child” seem to find consensus on the Spiritual’s ability to highlight the misery and grief that coincide with loss and depression resulting from family separation; yet, a listener may assume that the singer is mourning from the child’s perspective of someone losing their mother.²¹⁴ “Lord, How Come Me Here” is a Negro Spiritual that expounds a feeling of grief, hopelessness, and misery from the perspective of the parent.

To date, the earliest recorded performance of the Negro Spiritual “Lord, How Come Me Here?” was performed by Edgar Clark and Lawrence King in 1947. Like many spirituals that originated on southern plantations, “Lord, How Come Me Here?” was passed down orally through generations. However, unlike many traditional Negro Spirituals, this song openly questions God, as the singer grieves the loss of children and freedom due to the insidiousness of the slave system. The Spiritual evokes some of the most heinous images of chattel slavery imaginable. The Spiritual contains four stanzas and is a plea to God, as evidenced by the title *Lord, how come me here? There ain’t no freedom here*, repeated thrice in the second stanza, followed by *I wish I never was born*. To many, slavery was worse than death. Hundreds doomed to the dismal fate of slavery

²¹³ Donovan, A. (2025, January 9). *Marian Anderson’s role in the Civil Rights Movement - Connecticut history: A cthumanities project*. Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project - Stories about the people, traditions, innovations, and events that make up Connecticut’s rich history. <https://connecticuthistory.org/black-history-month-marian-anderson/>

²¹⁴ Claassens, L. J. (2023). “Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child.” Considering the Metaphor of Divine Adoption in the Context of Trauma. *Religions*, 14(1), 66. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010066>

would choose death for their children or themselves as opposed to enduring a lifetime of egregious inhumanity.²¹⁵

The last stanza articulates the nucleus for the causation of grief among enslaved mothers: *They sold my children away*; in other versions, the word *sold* is replaced with *stole*. Harriet Jacobs documents a horrendous occurrence of children being stolen and sold away from their mothers as each pleaded for the mercy of her children:

On one of those sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction block. She knew that some of them would be taken from her; but they took all. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all far away. She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them; this he refused to do.²¹⁶

Many notable artists have covered the Spiritual “Lord How Come Me Here?” Opera singers

Marian Anderson and Kathleen Battle lent their angelic voices to cover the spiritual.

Up-and-coming opera singer Kyaunnee Richardson performed a heartfelt a capella version of the Spiritual in a church sanctuary.²¹⁷ The passion of every one of these performers offers an exhilarating experience, eliciting sorrowful emotions as the singers captivate listeners and viewers with theatrical movements and gestures. Yet, despite these powerful performances, all three singers adopted operatic vocalization, which diverges from the traditional harmonic style of Spirituals rooted in oral and African melodic traditions. Spirituals, as documented by observers such as pastors and enslavers, and in oral narratives passed down through generations, had unique features

²¹⁵ Snyder, Terri L. “Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America.” *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 1 (2010): 39–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40662817>.

²¹⁶ Jacobs, H. A., Foster, F. S., & Yarborough, R. (2019). *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: Authoritative text, contexts, criticism*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

²¹⁷ Kyaunnee Richardson “Lord How Come Me Here?” YouTube. (n.d.-b). https://youtu.be/n9EBYWWz_40?si=fybu04dO3xND0FT7

 Lord, How Come Me Here? (Traditional Spiritual)

similar to West African melodic forms, such as call-and-response, emotional wails, chants, and stomp.

Sorrowful slave songs such as “Lord, How Come Me Here?” (see figure 7.2), were often sung in melancholic tones with fluctuating deep vocal rhythms.^{218,219} Roland Hayse’s version of “Lord, How Come Me Here?” is among the more authentic renditions of the Spiritual, partly due to his unique vocal approach. Born in 1887, Hayse was the son of formerly enslaved parents. Rising to the status of one of America’s acclaimed tenors, Hayse made his official debut in 1923 at Boston’s Symphony Hall by performing an array of spirituals and musical pieces by Mozart and others.²²⁰ In Hayse’s rendition of “Lord, How Come Me Here?” (1924), he sang with an irregular cadence and a fluctuating pitch while transitioning between wailing, singing, and speaking, which contributed to its emotional depth and historical resonance.²²¹

Few recordings of antebellum spirituals exist, which underscores their rarity and historical importance. However, several musicologists, including Alan Lomax, have documented the songs of spirituals and field songs through interviews with formerly enslaved people and recordings made in southern penitentiaries during the Jim Crow era, helping preserve this vital part of American history.

Lomax’s recordings were very important in the preservation of African American folk music. Due to his dedication in expanding the Archive’s collection, clear recordings of authentic Negro

²¹⁸ Johnson, J. W., Johnson, J. R., & Brown, L. (2003). *The books of American negro spirituals: Including The book of american negro spirituals and the second book of Negro Spirituals*. DaCapo.

²¹⁹ *African American spirituals*. The Library of Congress. (n.d.).
<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/>

²²⁰ Owens, Joanne. "Roland Hayes." New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Jan 28, 2022.
<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/roland-hayes-1887-1977/>

²²¹ Hayse, R. (n.d.). *The Art of Roland Hayse*. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk4XUMKXXvo>

Spirituals now exist. His recordings removed any secondary bias from the recorder, and allowed for the songs to be heard in their fullness. His recordings allow for other musicians to study the elements Negro Spirituals and folk music in a new way. His recordings were so clear and accurate, that secondary documentation was often not needed. In recording mostly in prisons, Lomax captured the true essence of a Negro work song, especially in regards to the emotion felt while doing the work. Some may think that his recordings are as close to actually hearing the original versions of Negro Spirituals as one may get.²²²

In several of these recordings, you can hear the children and grandchildren of former slaves vocalizing the field songs and spirituals on the plantations of Parchman Farms, which were field plantations converted to prisons, postbellum. You can hear the sorrow and melancholy in the voices of the women at Parchman Farm singing “Oh Freedom,” documented by Lomax as “No More Trouble” in 1936, less than 75 years after emancipation.²²³

²²² Anyaegbu, C. (2022, September 8). *John Lomax: The preservation of the negro spiritual*. Black Music Scholar.

<https://blackmusicscholar.com/john-lomax-the-preservation-of-the-negro-spiritual/>

²²³ Lomax, A. (Ed.). (1936, April 13). *Oh freedom*. Lomax Digital Archive. [Oh Freedom | Lomax Digital Archive](#)

Lord, How Come Me Here?

for SATB and Soloist, a cappella Based on an ad
by Sylvia O
arr. Evelyn Curenton

Recit.

Solo: *f*
1. Lord, how come me here? 2. Lord, how come me here? 3. Lord, how come me here?

Soprano: *mp* Hm *ppp* Hm Hm

Alto: *mp* Hm *ppp* Hm Hm

Tenor: *mp* Hm *ppp* Hm Hm

Bass: *mp* Hm *ppp* Hm Hm

Piano: *mp* (for rehearsal only)

Solo: *mf*
1. I wish I ne-ver was bo'n. 2. Dere ain't no free-dom here, Lord. 3. Dere's so much e-vil here, Lord.

Soprano: Hm Hm *mp* Hm

Alto: Hm Hm *mp* Hm

Tenor: Hm Hm *mp* Hm

Bass: Hm Hm *mp* Hm

Piano: *mp*

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Low resolution sample

© 1999-2024 Virtual Sheet Mus

*Lord, how come me here?
Lord, how come me here?
Lord, how come me here?
I wish I never was born*

*There ain't no freedom here, Lord
There ain't no freedom here, Lord
There ain't no freedom here, Lord
I wish I never was born*

*They treat me so mean here, Lord
They treat me so mean here, Lord
They treat me so mean here, Lord
I wish I never was born*

*They sold my chillen away, Lord
They sold my chillen away, Lord
They sold my chillen away, Lord
I wish I never was born*

- traditional Spiritual

Figure 7.2

Famine Ballads

Famine Ballads, like Negro Spirituals, relay the grief and misery experienced by victims of An Gorta Mor (The Great Hunger).²²⁴ It is necessary to define the term “victim” outside of our modern colloquial perceptions and expand our understanding to include a “victim” of inhumane circumstances. Unlike spirituals, which are born from the intricacies of “Old World” call-and-response, beat-and-rhythmic patterns fused with Protestant hymns to tell a tale of hardship, Famine Ballads incorporated exposition in their songs. Ballads relay not only the difficulties and misery accompanying the starvation, blight, death, and dystopia victims faced, but sometimes give the reason why so many ended up in the state of misery to begin with.²²⁵

Irish music was typically performed with more jovial energy before the Potato Famine of 1845-1852. Musicians and music generally did not carry as much of a depressive tone, as was evident in the mid to late 19th century. The research and documentation of music and cultural life in pre-famine Ireland are ongoing.²²⁶ Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin underlines the popularity and importance of musical gatherings, storytelling, pipers, and harpists in pre-famine Ireland, and how the blight turned festiveness into destitution. "Those who were fortunate enough to survive and who chose to remain in Ireland had to adapt to a new economic and cultural ethos that, for the most part, differed radically from the pre-famine intimacy of the clachán, or small intimate

²²⁴ Powell, M. (2016, March 11). *Songs of hunger - no depression*. No Depression: Roots Music and Culture Journalism.

²²⁵ Ó hAllmhuráin, Gearóid. “‘Amhrán an Ghorta’: The Great Famine and Irish Traditional Music.” *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 3, no. 1 (1999): 19–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20646272>.

²²⁶ Connolly, S. (1986). Popular Culture in Pre-Famine Ireland. *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 12(2), 12–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45331840>

village,²²⁷ and the townland and intimacy that sustained an indigenous corps of folk poets, dancing masters, and traveling musicians.”²²⁸

As blight took hold, crop failures intensified, leading to widespread suffering. This agricultural disaster contributed to the decline of Gaelic traditions among the Irish people, marking a significant cultural shift driven by economic hardship. Many musicians were either confined to workhouses, emigrated, or died, leaving behind the sorrows of victims to fill the void: “With the onslaught of famine, disease, and panic stricken emigration, the music maker too went the way of his audience- to the mass grave, the workhouse, and the coffin ship.”²²⁹

Ballads are poems or literary works that can be sung or recited to retell a story of historical significance or a folktale. They serve as vital tools for preserving collective memory of the Great Famine, helping future generations understand the depth of suffering and resilience. Ballads are similar to Negro Spirituals because they both began as oral utterances passed down for generations. However, spirituals began as musical components, whereas a lyrical intention in a poem, a written letter, or a verse could form a ballad. Many songs and ballads born out of the Great Famine corroborate a feeling of grief, depression, and misery caused by enormous death, hunger, and separation. Among the handful of famine ballads that have been preserved for the last 170 years, “Farewell to Skibbereen,” “Praties they Grow Small,” and “Kilkelly” (a ballad composed in the 20th century by Peter Jones based on the letters from Great Famine survivor

²²⁷ "Clachan n.". *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. Accessed 7 Feb 2026 <<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/clachan>>

²²⁸ Ó hAllmhuráin, Gearóid. “‘Amhrán an Ghorta’: The Great Famine and Irish Traditional Music.” *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 3, no. 1 (1999): 19–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20646272>.

²²⁹ Gribben, A. (1999). *The Great Famine and the Irish diaspora in America*. University of Massachusetts Press. 117.

Brian Hunt to John Hunt, between [1860]-[1891]) are three notable ballads that give the reader a picture of the trauma famine victims faced in An Gorta Mor.

“Farewell to Skibbereen”(figure 7.3), is attributed to Patrick Carpenter, poet and native of Skibbereen.²³⁰ Written in the form of a conversation, one of the ballad’s first appearances was in the 1869 edition of the Wearing of the Green songbook. The ballad contains six stanzas, seven in more traditional versions, with four lines in each stanza or verse. “Farewell to Skibbereen,” also called “Revenge for Skibbereen” or “Dear Old Skibbereen,” is a dialogue between a father and his son. “Skibbereen” is one of the most famous songs from the Irish Famine and the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848. In the lyrics, the boy asks his father why he left Skibbereen when he hears that the land is so beautiful, and the father’s replies are filled with tragic details of blight, death, eviction, and greed.²³¹

Echoes of grief and misery are evident in the song and poem “Farewell to Skibbereen.” The reader and listener should feel the weight of loss and despair, recognizing the deep emotional toll of these events. The child, whom the father is addressing in the text, is motherless, as relayed in the fourth stanza, which details the dramatic events. *She fainted o’er in anguish with the desolation round. She never rose, but passed away from life to immortal dream...* The agony one would endure from slavery and from watching one’s spouse or child die and not being able to help or change the situation was, indeed, a leading cause of grief in these horrifying historical periods. The misery resulted in suffering and anguish. It isn’t difficult to imagine the father in Skibbereen feeling abandoned by God, as the “Lord, How Come Me Here?” singers did. Child abandonment was not unheard of during famine, and the Irish Potato Famine was no

²³⁰ Murphy, P. (2025, November 17). *Listen: A history of the great hunger ballad “Skibbereen.”* IrishCentral.com.

²³¹ Maxwell, N. (2019, March 26). “old skibbereen”: Fenian anthem or famine lament? History Ireland. [‘Old Skibbereen’: Fenian anthem or Famine lament? - History Ireland](https://www.historyireland.com/2019/03/26/old-skibbereen-fenian-anthem-or-famine-lament/)

exception. Scores of children and families were abandoned between 1845 and 1855 for several reasons. Death from hunger and sickness was the most common; however, many incidences of forced abandonment and separation in workhouses, as well as parental (mainly paternal) abandonment, were widespread as fathers left their households to escape the shame and disintegration bestowed on their families, often leading to an undoubted victory for death.²³²

The feeling of longing to return home to the “Motherland” is a sentiment Irish Emigrants undoubtedly shared with Africans and their descendants enslaved in America. Spirituals, similar to ballads, held dual meanings: in “Motherless Child,” the notion of being a long way from home also applied to African descendants being a long way from Africa,²³³ just as the father’s anguish of being a long way from his home in “Skibbereen,” addressed in the last stanza. Recognizing this emotional connection can help the audience appreciate the profound cultural and historical significance of these songs, fostering empathy and respect for shared experiences.

On March 14, 2017, while sitting on a booth bench in Campbell’s Tavern in Cloughanover, Ireland, Don Stiffe sang “Skibbereen” with Kathleen Boyle on the piano.²³⁴ For Stiffe, this ballad is personal; he was adopted from a shelter for mothers with children in Tipperary at three months of age. He would spend years searching for his birth mother. However, she would pass away a year before he was given substantial information about her whereabouts.²³⁵ Although disheartened that he could not meet her in person, Stiffe was able to

²³² Kinealy, C., King, J., & Moran, G. (2018). *Children and the great hunger in Ireland*. Quinipiac University Press, pp. 27-73.

²³³ Jones, Arthur C. (2023). *Wade in the water: The wisdom of the spirituals*. Orbis Books.

²³⁴ Carpenter, P. (2017, March 14). *Don Stiffe & Kathleen Boyle - Skibbereen | Tigh Campbell, Cloch an Uabhair, Gaillimh | Geantraí TG4*. YouTube.

 Don Stiffe & Kathleen Boyle - Skibbereen | Tigh Campbell, Cloch an Uabhair, Gai...

²³⁵ Hand, J. (2017, August 8). *Irish TV star battled for years to find his birth mum - only to find out she had died when he finally tracked her down*. The Irish Sun. <https://www.thesun.ie/living/1370423/irish-tv-star-don-stiffe-battled-for-years-to-find-his-birth-mum-only-to-find-out-she-had-died-when-he-finally-tracked-her-down/>

reconnect with several siblings on his mother's side. His rendition of "Skibbereen" conveys an emotional depth that underscores his personal connection to the ballad, resonating with listeners who understand themes of loss and longing: *When you think there's maybe eight to ten thousand people right under where you're sitting, it brings a more personal note. That's what it does to me anyway.*²³⁶

Stiffe's exposition before serenading the audience with a traditional Irish harmony style is called sean-nós. *Sean-nós*, a traditional musical style that roughly translates from Gaelic as *old-style*, is categorized by its complex style of vocal ornamentation, intense emotional expressions, and the freedom "singers have to stretch or shorten musical phrases to express the emotion of the song better."²³⁷

Sean-nós is traditionally sung a capella or without instruments and often in Gaelic (pre-famine). Its rhythmic fluctuation gives the singer more privileges to ornament notes than syllabic Western-style music. A video collage posted on the YouTube channel of The Irish Traditional Music Channel (TradTG4), featuring Sean Garvey, Tomás Ó Mainín, and Tadhg Ó Meachoir, showcases the tradition and beauty of the *sean-nós* style as the singers perform "Farewell To Skibbereen" with several verses in Gaelic (while Irish is a Gaelic language, the language is generally called Irish in contemporary Ireland. However, both terms are acceptable).²³⁸

²³⁶ Don Stiffe & Kathleen Boyle - *Skibbereen* | Tigh Campbell, Cloch an Uabhair, Gaillimh | *Geantraí* | TG4. YouTube.

²³⁷ Cointre, G. L. (2023, November 30). *Sean-nós - Irish folk song* • *go-to-ireland.com*. Guide Irlande.com. <https://www.go-to-ireland.com/culture/sean-nos/>

²³⁸ Carpenter, P. (2017b, June 15). *Skibbereen*. YouTube. [Skibbereen](#)

Expressions and vocalization are fundamental in conveying the emotion of poetry, ballads, and singing. The traditional *sean-nós* style used in Irish Ballads adds to the depth of connection with spirituals, which share a similar melismatic vocal style, allowing the singer to stretch a single syllable into several notes.

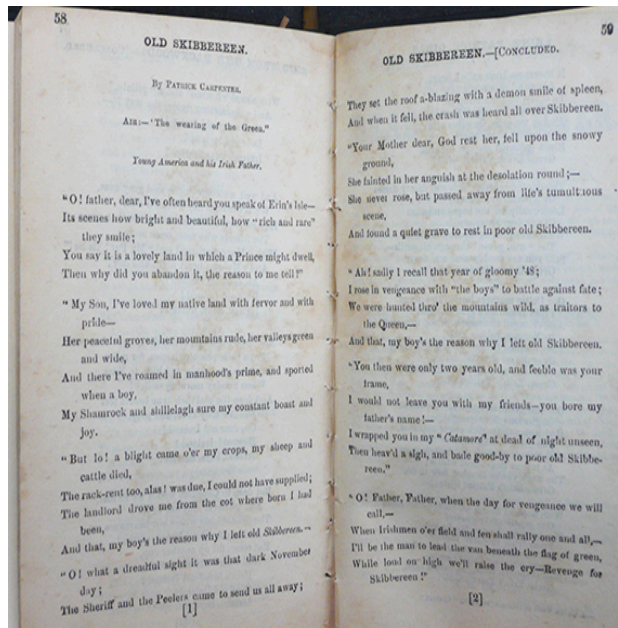


Figure 7.3

Above: Pages 58 and 59 of *The favorite 'Irish Sunburst' songster, No. 3*, printed by Robert M. De Witt, 33 Rose Street, New York, in 1873, with the same lyrics, also attributed to Patrick Carpenter, that appeared in *The wearing of the green songbook* in Boston in 1869.²³⁹

Figure 7.4

²³⁹ Maxwell, N. (2019, March 26). "*old skibbereen*": *Fenian anthem or famine lament?* History Ireland. <https://historyireland.com/old-skibberee-n-fenian-anthem-famine-lament/>

A traditional song about the 1840s Irish Famine. Skibbereen is a town in County Cork.

O, father dear I oftimes hear you speak of
Erin's Isle
Her lofty scenes, her valleys green, her
mountains rude and wild
They say it is a lovely land wherein a prince
might dwell
So why did you abandon it, the reason to me
tell

My son, I loved my native land with energy
and pride
Till a blight came over all my crops and my
sheep and cattle died
The rents and taxes were to pay and I could
not them redeem
And that's the cruel reason why I left old
Skibbereen

'Tis well I do remember that bleak
November (/December) day
When the bailiff and the landlord came to
drive us all away
They set the roof on fire with their cursed
English spleen
And that's another reason why I left old
Skibbereen

Your mother, too, God rest her soul, lay on
 the snowy ground
 She fainted in her anguishing seeing the
 desolation round
 She never rose, but passed away from life to
 immortal dreams
 And that's another reason why I left old
 Skibbereen

Then sadly I recall the days of gloomy
 forty-eight.
 I rose in vengeance with the boys to battle
 again' fate.
 We were hunted through the mountains as
 traitors to the queen,
 And that, my boy, is the reason why I left
 old Skibbereen.

Oh you were only two years old and feeble
 was your frame
 I could not leave you with my friends for
 you bore your father's name
 So I wrapped you in my *cóta mór* at the dead
 of night unseen
 And I heaved a sigh and I said goodbye to
 dear old Skibbereen

Well father dear, the day will come when on
 vengeance we will call
 And Irishmen both stout and tall will rally
 unto the call
 I'll be the man to lead the van beneath the
 flag of green
 And loud and high we'll raise the cry,
 "Revenge for Skibbereen!"

“Kilkelly” (Figure 7.5) is a 5-stanza, 24-verse ballad released in 1983. It was composed by Peter Jones based on the letters that his great-great-great-grandfather, Brian Hunt, had sent to his son John Hunt, Peter's great-great-grandfather from Kilkelly, County Mayo, Ireland between 1860 and 1890. Brian Hunt could not read or write well, so he enlisted the help of local schoolmaster Pat MacNamara to write letters to his son John, who emigrated to America during the Irish Famine. The letters were found in the attic of Peter Jones' Maryland home. Musician, folksinger, and historian Jeff Snow is in possession of transcripts of the letters that Brian sent to his son, John, which is how I was able to obtain a PDF copy through internet communication with Snow.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Snow, J. (n.d.). *Jeff Snow*. Jeff Snow about. <http://www.jeffsnow.net/about.html>

Figure 7.5

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 60, my dear and loving son
John
Your good friend the schoolmaster
Pat McNamara's so good as to write these words
down.

Your brothers have all gone to find work in England,
the house is so empty and sad
The crop of potatoes is sorely infected,
a third to a half of them bad.
And your sister Brigid and Patrick O'Donnell
are going to be married in June.
Your mother says not to work on the railroad
and be sure to come on home soon.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 70, dear and loving son John
Hello to your Mrs and to your 4 children,
may they grow healthy and strong.
Michael has got in a wee bit of trouble,
I guess that he never will learn.
Because of the dampness there's no turf to speak of
now we have nothing to burn.
And Brigid is happy, you named a child for her
although she's got six of her own.
You say you found work, but you don't say
what kind or when you will be coming home.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 80, dear Michael and
John, my sons
I'm sorry to give you the very sad news
that your dear old mother has gone.
We buried her down at the church in Kilkelly,
your brothers and Brigid were there.
You don't have to worry, she died very quickly,
remember her in your prayers.
And it's so good to hear that Michael's returning,

with money he's sure to buy land
For the crop has been poor and the people
are selling at any price that they can.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 90, my dear and loving son
John
I guess that I must be close on to eighty,
it's thirty years since you're gone.
Because of all of the money you send me,
I'm still living out on my own.
Michael has built himself a fine house
and Brigid's daughters have grown.
Thank you for sending your family picture,
they're lovely young women and men.
You say that you might even come for a visit,
what joy to see you again.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 92, my dear brother John
I'm sorry that I didn't write sooner to tell you that
father passed on.
He was living with Brigid, she says he was cheerful
and healthy right down to the end.
Ah, you should have seen him play with
the grandchildren of Pat McNamara, your friend.
And we buried him alongside of mother,
down at the Kilkelly churchyard.
He was a strong and a feisty old man,
considering his life was so hard.
And it's funny the way he kept talking about you,
he called for you in the end.
Oh, why don't you think about coming to visit,
we'd all love to see you again.

John Hunt was just 13 when he emigrated to the U.S. in 1855 due to the lingering effects of the Great Famine that had left many in Ireland destitute. The father's love for his son is immeasurable. The emotional connection between Brian and his wife, and their longing to reunite with their son, gives the reader a sense of the familial bond broken by the Potato Famine.

You say you found work, but don't say What kind or when will you be coming home? The last verse in the second stanza highlights the son's trepidation to tell his parents he's found work on the railroad, a job that his mother would've been reluctant to acknowledge because of reports of the many deaths of Irishmen working the canals and railroads.²⁴¹ The last line, asking his son when he will come home, is a theme that echoes throughout the ballad and the many letters Brian wrote to John. Emphasizing the trauma of emigration and return can help the audience connect emotionally with the emigrant's experience. Given the conundrum many emigrants must have experienced in the 19th century, one can only imagine the emotional toll John must have endured absent from his parents—an emotion shared by so many victims of slavery and famine.

It's challenging to determine whether John or Brian understood the emotional or economic implications involved in a father-son reunion. Highlighting these economic factors can evoke concern about the broader consequences of such reunions. Would John be putting his job at risk by returning to visit his parents, losing pay and the ability to feed his family in America, and thereby affecting his ability to send money to his family in Ireland? Would John's return reignite any trauma he may have felt while living in Ireland? A 13-year-old child who had no choice in leaving his family to travel to a new land is traumatic in itself; returning to your homeland, which you undoubtedly cherish, yet stirs so many traumatic memories, and will no doubt be very different from what you remember, can be mentally debilitating.²⁴²

“Kilkelly” serves as a transitional component to this thesis. Not only do the letters from Byran Hunt to John Hunt provide narrative of the societal conditions poor Irish were facing even after the Blight subsided, similar to how the Negro Narratives from formerly enslaved people

²⁴¹ Hunt, B. (n.d.). *Letters from Brian Hunt to his son John Hunt*. Jeff Snow [kilkelly_letters](http://www.jeffsnow.net/kilkelly_letters). <http://www.jeffsnow.net/kilkelly.html>

²⁴² Kelly, J. (2013). *The graves are walking: The great famine and the saga of the Irish people*. Picador.

detail the conditions of servitude, but it also gives a first person perspective of a father's yearning to reunite with his son whose absence caused a tremendous void in the hearts of his family. This personal longing should evoke empathy and a deeper emotional connection in the audience, emphasizing the universal pain of family separation.

Is it more traumatic to be forcefully separated from your family and not know whether they are still alive, or to be separated from your children by circumstances, know that they are alive, and in many cases, knowing their whereabouts; however, not reuniting with them? Such a topic is worth deeper analysis, as it invites the audience to consider the emotional toll of uncertainty and longing. The trauma and grief endured by enslaved people and famine victims during separation, whether forced or circumstantial, highlight the profound emotional suffering experienced by millions, including those affected by "Kilkelly."

Although one can gather from the letters that John unfortunately never reunited with his father, scores of Irish families reunited with at least some of their loved ones in North America through chain migration in the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁴³ However, those numbers underscore the many who *weren't* reunited with their families. The percentages are even less as it pertains to the reunification of formerly enslaved people in the postbellum South.²⁴⁴ These figures highlight the scale of social trauma caused by separation, emphasizing the long-lasting emotional and social scars that inform our understanding of family trauma in historical contexts.

One can imagine how heartbreaking it must be for families to be separated by force, forced into workhouses, adopted, or forcibly immigrated to distant lands like Australia and North

²⁴³ Irish Emigration to America - The Journey | ARD-mhúsaem na héireann. (n.d.-b).
[https://www.museum.ie/ga-IE/Collections-Research/Folklife-Collections/Folklife-Collections-List-\(1\)/Other/Emigration/Irish-Emigration-to-America-The-Journey](https://www.museum.ie/ga-IE/Collections-Research/Folklife-Collections/Folklife-Collections-List-(1)/Other/Emigration/Irish-Emigration-to-America-The-Journey)

²⁴⁴ Williams, H. A. (2012). *Help me to find my people: The African American search for family lost in slavery*. University of North Carolina Press.

America.²⁴⁵ The emotions of enslaved mothers chanting, "They Stole My Children Away" and "Lord, How come me here?" are indeed emotional connections that could be shared with the millions of Irish families who witnessed their children taken from them as a result of the Irish Famine.

While "Skibbereen" was a ballad composed from a poem in the form of a conversational exchange between a boy and his father, the ballad "Kilkelly" was constructed from actual letters the author's great-great-great-grandfather had sent to the author's great-great-grandfather, who had emigrated from Kilkelly, Ireland in 1855. This contrast highlights the deep roots of Irish storytelling and history, fostering a sense of connection and curiosity in the audience.

Robbie O'Connell (1995) may have one of the most famous renditions of the ballad "Kilkelly." Born in Waterford, Ireland, O'Connell began playing the guitar and singing at the age of 13.²⁴⁶ O'Connell toured with the Clancy Brothers, and with the Green Fields of America which included Mick Moloney, Jimmy Keane, Eileen Ivers, and Seamus Egan. After 40 years of living in America, O'Connell retired to Waterford, Ireland.²⁴⁷ Robbie O'Connell's version of "Kilkelly" has an acoustic ambiance and a soft melody that create a damp, melancholic mood. In Robbie O'Connell's live performance of "Kilkelly" on stage with Finbar Clancy (1995), the viewer can observe an image of dejection in the face of the singer and audience while listening to the ballad that has moved so many.²⁴⁸

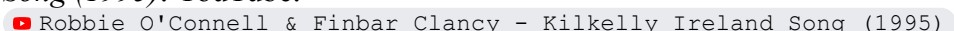
Kevin McKrell is a singer, writer, artist, and sculptor who has written numerous songs, many of which incorporate Irish Folklore. McKrell was born in the capital region of New York to

²⁴⁵ Ibid

²⁴⁶ O'Connell, R. (2021, October 15). *About*. Robbie O'Connell. <https://www.robbyoconnell.com/about-robby-oconnell>

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ O'Connell, R., & Clancy, F. (n.d.). *Robbie O'Connell & Finbar Clancy - Kilkelly Ireland Song (1995)*. YouTube.

 Robbie O'Connell & Finbar Clancy - Kilkelly Ireland Song (1995)

Irish parents.²⁴⁹ McKrell's version is similar to O'Connell's version of “Kilkelly” in that he uses an acoustic guitar to guide the melody; however, he adds a distinctive touch that invites the audience to appreciate his unique interpretation. McKrell transitions between harmonic and spoken prose in the 2018 performance of the ballad at Don's Space, as well as between poetic spoken dialogue and spoken prose.²⁵⁰ McKrell’s personal storytelling with *sean-nós* creates a sense of intimacy, encouraging the audience to feel connected and valued.

While Kevin McKrell’s rendition of “Kilkelly” provides a traditional storytelling experience, Rowena Taheny also draws on *sean-nós* tradition through the melodic use of Irish vocal techniques, such as ornamentation and microtonal inflections, in the ballad. Her tones and fluctuation of consonant pitches can mesmerize the listener into a feeling of surreal catharsis. Additionally, the album, *Irish Roses: Women of Celtic Song*, published by Brigham Phillips, offers a compelling glimpse into Irish women’s vocal traditions, inviting curiosity and deeper engagement from the audience.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Sandy Tomcho, T. H.-R. (2010, December 16). *McKrells Mix Celtic, bluegrass*. Record. [McKrells mix Celtic, bluegrass](#)

²⁵⁰ Jones, P. (2018, October 5). *Kevin McKrell (Kilkelly, Ireland Song)*. YouTube. [▶ Kevin McKrell \(Kilkelly, Ireland Song\)](#)

²⁵¹ Jones, P. (2024, June 9). *Kilkelly Ireland lyrics by Rowena Taheny*. Bells Irish Lyrics. <https://www.bellsirishlyrics.com/kilkelly.html>

[▶ Kilkelly](#)

“No More Weeping and Wailing”

Music has been a mechanism for healing and mourning and a way to communicate grief and happiness for thousands of years. This universal language has been shown to elicit tremendously powerful neurological responses in humans and animals, underscoring its emotional power.²⁵² Spirituals, formed by combining the psalms and hymns of Protestant Christianity imposed on enslaved Africans with the beats, chants, and rhythms from their native land, served as a vital form of emotional expression and cultural resilience. This amalgamation gave birth to music that portrayed the sorrow, disdain, and misery of slavery, reflecting how music can embody collective suffering and hope. Ballads written and sung during the Irish Potato Famine told a dark tale of death, neglect, poverty, and despair, illustrating how specific musical forms serve as outlets for communal grief. Musical, gregarious, respected, and jovial performances descended into seclusion and horror, showing the complex emotional journey music can represent across different historical contexts.

What historians have gathered from analyzing Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads is that they portray a society of abject demoralization, forced slavery, torture, rape, and family separation. Exploring the literal and figurative accounts these victims endured under abhorrent treatment, the listener can observe how fearful the subjugated were at the thought of being separated from parents, children, and other family members. We can identify the similarities of grief and misery the Irish victims of the Famine share with victims of those enslaved.

²⁵² Mota-Rojas, D. et. al. (2025, March 7). *The neurobiological basis of emotions and their connection to facial expressions in non-human mammals: Insights in nonverbal communication*. *Frontiers in veterinary science*.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11926555/>

The Negro Spiritual “Soon I Will Be Done”(figure 7.6) made its televised debut under the performance of Mahalia Jackson in the film *Imitation of Life* 1959.^{253,254} One of the first spiritual arrangements was composed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and Hampton Institute (1927). William Dawson also arranged a spiritual composition in 1934. As an tribute to Mahalia Jackson, musician and peace advocate, Sinéad O’Connor revived the Negro Spiritual with her own rendition of “Soon I Will Be Done” (2020), further highlighting the parallels in Irish and African American struggles.²⁵⁵

Figure 7.8

Refrain:

Soon-a will be done a-with the troubles of the world,
 Troubles of the world,
 The troubles of the world.
 Soon-a will be done a-with the troubles of the world,
 Goin' home to live with God.

1 No more weeping and a-wailing,
 No more weeping and a-wailing,

No more weeping and a-wailing,
 I'm goin' to live with God. [Refrain]

2 I want t'meet my mother,
 I want t'meet my mother,
 I want t'meet my mother,
 I'm goin' to live with God. [Refrain]

3 I want t'meet my Jesus,
 I want t'meet my Jesus,
 I want t'meet my Jesus,
 I'm goin' to live with God. [Refrain]

²⁵³Sirk, D. (Director). (1959). *Imitation of Life* [Film]. Universal International.

²⁵⁴ YouTube. (n.d.-d). [Mahalia Jackson - Trouble Of The World \(Imitation Of Life - 1959\)](#)

²⁵⁵ Snow, K. (2023, November 2). *The meaning behind the song: Trouble of the world by Sinéad O'Connor*. Beat Crave.

Sinead O'Connor was a humanitarian. Instrumental in her advocacy for global human rights and bringing attention to the plight of Irish people under the authority of British rule and the crisis of pedophilia in the Catholic Church, she also spoke out against the oppression of Blacks in America. In October 2020, O'Connor released a single rendition of the spiritual "Trouble of the World," also historically titled "Soon I Will Be Done." Her rendition of the Spiritual signifies an acknowledgment and connection of Negro Spiritual with the Irish struggles. The artist, who was vocal about the sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, the Great Famine, and Ireland's Troubles, had also been outspoken against the mistreatment of marginalized communities around the world.²⁵⁶ Although some have analyzed the spiritual as a message of "hope" and anticipation of life beyond slavery, the words paint a grim picture. This stage of grief indicates acceptance, where the griever acknowledges that life has changed and will not return to events before the trauma. *No more weeping and wailing. I want to meet my mother. I Want to Meet my Jesus*; these verses indicate a griever who's accepted one's fate and is soon anticipating a life after death. In interviews, O'Connor revealed that her inspiration for the rendition was to call attention to the Black Lives Matter protest taking place in the U.S. in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.²⁵⁷ However, the Spiritual also carries symbolic meaning. O'Connor was very outspoken about her dysfunctional upbringing: the sexual abuse she endured by a priest in her

²⁵⁶ O'Connor, S. (2020, October 2). *Trouble Of The World (a cappella)*. YouTube.

 [Trouble Of The World \(a cappella\)](#)  [Sinead O'Connor - "Trouble of the World"](#)

²⁵⁷ Snow, K. (2023, November 2). *The meaning behind the song: Trouble of the world by Sinéad O'Connor*. Beat Crave.

youth and her hatred towards her family for ignoring her trauma.^{258·259} The rendition of “Troubles of the World” is a cathartic embodiment of the bond and connections between Black and Irish struggles concerning grief and misery.

²⁵⁸ Banim, J. (2024, March 16). *Sinead O’Connor’s heartbreaking life from childhood abuse to son’s tragic death*. Daily Mirror.
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/sinead-oconnors-heartbreaking-life-childhood-31841770>

²⁵⁹ Before O’Connor’s rendition of the Negro Spiritual, I planned to dedicate a chapter of my thesis to the Irish singer because of her efforts to call attention to the struggles of Black and Irish people, which was a profound inspiration behind my dissertation focus. Recognizing her work highlights the importance of acknowledging cultural struggles, which I hope resonates with readers interested in these themes. It is tremendously disheartening that I was unable to finish it before her passing.

Chapter 8: Significance of Preserving Famine Ballads and Spirituals in Folk Music

“The history of a people are found in its songs.” ~ George Jellinek

Chapter 7 examined the similarities between Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads in their relation to the traumatic grief experienced by victims of both humanitarian atrocities, aiming to foster understanding and compassion in the audience. Highlighting this grief can help the audience feel connected and empathetic towards those suffering, which is essential for deepening their engagement with the cultural significance of these songs.

Spirituals, ballads, and folk songs were once transmitted orally from generation to generation; their history predates modern media such as phonographs, television, radio, and mobile devices. Recognizing their role in cultural continuity can inspire the audience to appreciate the importance of preserving these traditions and understanding their impact on history.

Folk music is known to have been traditionally passed down orally and aurally within families and communities, serving as a vital method for maintaining cultural heritage and shared history across generations.²⁶⁰ Folk songs reflect the societal conditions of their time, helping the audience feel connected and empathetic to past experiences. Folk music is important for several reasons. In this chapter, two key points will be emphasized: 1. Folk music acts as a means of preserving culture, and 2. It serves as a way to express grief over societal transgressions, such as oppression and subjugation.²⁶¹ This chapter will discuss a brief historiography of Irish and American folklore as it pertains to Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads. The chapter will focus

²⁶⁰Nettl, B. (2026, January 22). folk music. Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-music>

²⁶¹ Sieling, P. (2003). *Folk music*. Mason Crest Publishers.

on two specific folk songs: "Many Thousands Gone," sung on plantation fields by enslaved people, and "Praties, They Grow Small," believed to have originated during the Potato Famine in County Donegal, Ireland. Highlighting their cultural significance helps illustrate how folklore bonds communities and preserves shared histories across generations.

Irish Folk Songs

The modern understanding of Irish folk music traces its origins to oral traditions passed down through generations, similar to other cultures. It was only in the 18th century, amid conflicts with England, that these oral traditions began to be documented in written form. Irish folk music, developed over nearly two thousand years, reflects the diverse ethnic groups that once inhabited and conquered the Emerald Isle, now part of the Celtic diaspora.²⁶² There was a second revival to document and transfer the lyrics of Irish folk music during the Gaelic Renaissance (roughly 1870s to 1920s) and approaching the centennial anniversary of the Great Calamity, otherwise known as the Potato Famine, which lasted from 1845 to 1852. Although discussions of famine were usually regarded as taboo, Deborah Peck attributes this sensitivity to a stage of inhibition, where survivors "...voluntarily censor their own talking about the dramatic experience."²⁶³ However, ethnomusicologists and Irish historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wanted to preserve the music and ballads created as a result of the Great Famine, and contemporary initiatives continue to safeguard these traditions through digital archives and community projects, aiming to eliminate the possibility of the Famine Ballads being lost and forgotten.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Falc'her-Poyroux, E. (2014a). The Great Irish Famine in songs. *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, 19(2), 157–172. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.277>

²⁶³ Valone, D. A., & Kinealy, C. (2002). *Ireland's great hunger*. University Press of America. 159

²⁶⁴ Falc'her-Poyroux, E. (2014a). The Great Irish Famine in songs. *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, 19(2), 157–172. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.277>

Digital Tradition Mirror

The Famine Song (Praties They Grow Small)

Oh the praties they are small_ o-ver here. Oh the praties they are small_ o-ver here. Oh the praties they are small And way up in Don - e - gal, We___ eat them skins and all___ o - ver here, o - ver here, And we eat them skins and all___ o - ver here.

(This score available as [ABC](#), [SongWright](#), [PostScript](#), [PNG](#), or [PMW](#), or [a MIDI file](#))
[Pennywhistle notation](#) and [Dulcimer tab](#) for this song is also available

The Famine Song (Praties They Grow Small)

Oh the praties they grow small, over here (2x)
 Oh the praties they grow small
 And way up in Donegal
 We eat them skins and all, over here, over here
 We eat them skins and all, over here.

Oh I wish that we were geese, night and morn, (2x)
 Oh I wish that we were geese
 Till the hour of our release
 When we' d live and die in peace, stuffing corn, stuffing corn
 When we' d live and die in peace, stuffing corn.

Oh, they'll grind us into dust, over here (2x)
 Oh, they'll grind us into dust,
 But the Lord in whom we trust
 Will return us crumb for crust, over here, over here
 Will return us crumb for crust, over here.

Note: Refers to the great potato famine of 1847–1848. Oddly enough, this song is probably a parody of a song, "The Wonderful Song of 'Over There'", published by Atwill in 1844. Another case of the parody outlasting the original. In any case, there are a large number of American parodies of this one. RG

RG

Thanks to [Mudcat](#) for the Digital Tradition!

Figure 8.1

Among the most significant lyrical treasures from Irish Famine Ballads is the folk song "The Praties, They Grow Small," which exemplifies the cultural memory of the period (see figure 8.1). "The Praties, They Grow Small" is an Irish Famine Song. It should not be confused with Irish Emigration Songs, which harmonized about leaving Ireland during the Great Famine, or Protest Songs, like "Skibbereen," which envisioned a time to avenge the deaths of the fallen due to the Famine. It is, instead, a song that laments the actual calamitous effects of the Blight. While other songs composed during the time detail the depression and misery experienced due to neglect, hunger, and disease, this song offers a pertinent reason: "The Praties, They Grow Small," and because of that, death, starvation, and sickness will soon follow.

Most renditions of the ballad respect the traditional format, emphasizing its cultural importance. Since its inception, this famine song has been sung with as many as five or more verses and 5-7 lines, depending on the folk singer. However, most renditions have been consistent with the traditional format. The first line of the first verse, *Oh the praties they grow small, over here, over here*, is a traditional starting verse with any variation of the folk song and is repeated twice at the beginning of the stanza. The third line repeats the first portion of the first line, and the fourth line is the only line in each stanza that isn't duplicated, while the sixth line duplicates the fifth.

The first verse of the ballad reflects the title "The Praties They Grow Small," which draws attention to the potato blight, or Great Calamity, which devastated crops from 1845 to 1850. The third through fifth lines in the traditional folk song more than likely identify the county origin of the ballad, exclaiming *And up in Donegal, we eat them coat and all...* which stresses the importance of the potato to the Irish diet at the time. Other versions of the ballad suggest that the crops are picked in the fall or eaten from the spring to the fall.

A benefit to the existence of various versions of a folk song is that the song evades the charge of being one-size-fits-all, that is, being too formalized. It allows modifications to capture the artist's mood depending on the region and their life experiences. Ballads adapt to the singer's emotions and experiences, while maintaining the song's luster and original meaning. While analyzing various versions of "The Praties, They Grow Small" also given the title of "The Famine Song," perspectives emerged that provided insight into the emotional zeitgeist of the community. Folk music encompasses more than just an arrangement of words that describe events experienced by the original singers; it also involves their spirit. One of the significant gifts folk music lends to singers, generation after generation, is the ability to connect them to the past. Out of more than three dozen versions of "The Praties, They Grow Small," I have yet to identify two versions sung entirely the same (which is another commonality this song shares with Negro Spirituals).

Carolyn Hester helped popularize the folk song "Praties They Grow Small" in America.²⁶⁵ She made her way into the folk music scene in the late fifties and early sixties, performing in local bars and small venues. She performed with Dylan, Pete Seeger, and others.²⁶⁶ Hester's rendition of "Praties..." demonstrates one example of how folk songs are adapted to the knowledge of the audience. Her lyrics have slight modifications from the traditional ballad. In the first verse, she sings *..and we dig them in the fall*, which would have unlikely been a part of the traditional ballad, notes one writer, because Irish peasants during the Great Famine did not wait until the fall to harvest potatoes, instead harvesting them in August.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Barnes, M. (2025, May 5). *From the Archives: Recalling Austin Folk singer Carolyn Hester and her ties to Bob Dylan*. Statesman.

²⁶⁶ *Praties they grow small*. Irish Music Daily. (2022, December 1).

<https://www.irishmusicdaily.com/praties-they-grow-small>

 Carolyn Hester - The Praties They Grow Small (Famine Song)

²⁶⁷Ibid

Irish Band Shaskeen has performed traditional Irish music for over 50 years.²⁶⁸ Their rendition of "Praties..." is one of the more notable covers because it emphasizes the traditional motif established by the Irish Famine singers regarding their religious reverence for God. The traditional version follows, *and the lord in whom we trust will return us crumb for crust....* highlighting the deep Irish Catholic reverence for God, even during this calamity. Shaskeen appears to question this reverence with their rendition. The second verse of their ballad reads, *Oh, the God in Whom We Trust He has left us crumb for crust, and soon we will be dust over here.*²⁶⁹ This verse not only questions a belief in God's protection but also evokes feelings of anger and injustice, challenging the Catholic zeitgeist of the period. No rendition similar to the verses Shaskeen sings in the ballads has been found, and although I have emailed them about these lyrics, I have not yet received a reply. It does seem that their rendition was composed by the band themselves. Another verse performed by Shaskeen, not heard in other editions, concerns the children who suffered enormously during the Irish Famine. The Band sings, *Oh, the children cry in pain, 'cause they'll ne'er see light again, and they will leave their bodies over here.* The reference to children's suffering and the rebuke of God set Shaskeen's rendition apart from the others; they emphasize the anger and destitution of the Famine in such a flagrant way that there is little doubt about the destruction and trauma it caused.

Folk singers' ability to connect songs and ballads of the past to the present is a skill that fosters a sense of continuity and relevance. The ability of folk songs to remain meaningful depends in part on the singer's capacity to reinterpret their message, telling a new story while honoring their historical roots. Eve Telford is an Australian folk singer based on Cork County,

²⁶⁸ *Band members*. Shaskeen. (n.d.). <https://shaskeen.net/the-band/>

²⁶⁹ *Shaskeen-Praties They Grow Small*. YouTube. (2008, May 12). https://youtu.be/rp3ENSiKtG4?si=YA4bHuuWj_36lYoX

 Shaskeen - Praties They Grow Small


Ireland, who has performed Irish Traveller music with her partner, Jimmy Crowley.²⁷⁰ As a Cork Palestine Solidarity Campaign member, Eve Telford performed the song "The Praties, They Grow Small" at a protest march in 2024.²⁷¹

The premise of this chapter is to convey the spiritual connection between the descendants of the American chattel slave institution and the victims of the Great Irish Famine (An Gorta Mór), specifically through analyzing the similarities and meanings in the music produced by both groups, emphasizing themes of resistance, suffering, and resilience rooted in their unique historical contexts. However, the purpose of this section extends beyond the comparison of spirituals and ballads to transcend all victims of genocidal conflicts. Certain songs were purposely selected that have morphed into reflections on other-world atrocities, illustrating how music serves as a powerful medium for social justice and solidarity. Examples include songs that explicitly protest oppression or call for liberation. By laying the foundation for further postdoctoral research, this project establishes an outline for how the author will continue to expand on how music, poetry, and ballads can serve as a medium of dialogue and solidarity between unfamiliar nations that have faced historical oppression. The songs and ballads in this section are especially indicative of transcending nature, having gone beyond the realm of Negro Spirituals or Famine Ballads to highlight many historical and contemporary struggles, including themes of resistance and liberation. Telford's rendition is a prime example of how folk songs can find meaning in current situations, underscoring folk music's indispensable relevance in society.

Jennifer Concannon from Derry, Northern Ireland, draws on the Troubles period to infuse her rendition with emotion and empathy. Concannon, who adopts the stage name "Queen

²⁷⁰ Long, S. (2023, March 3). *Jimmy Crowley and Eve Telford: Hello! child ballads learned from Irish Travellers – a collection loyal to Song Circle Tradition*. The Irish Times.

²⁷¹ Telford, E. (Trans.). (2024, March 30). *The Praties They Grow Small (Irish Famine Song) - Eve Telford*. YouTube https://youtu.be/6f99jOli0mU?si=1JnDNUQ-R4g9_uhF.

 [The Praties They Grow Small \(Irish Famine Song\) - Eve Telford](https://youtu.be/6f99jOli0mU?si=1JnDNUQ-R4g9_uhF)

Grace”—a tribute to the pirate Queen Grainne O’Malley (1530-1603)—is a folk singer who combines distinctive *sean-nos* vocals with traditional folk instruments to highlight feminist causes in society. Here, ornamentation and vibrato infuse her folk songs with a unique vocal quality, making her rendition one of the most emotional and cathartic.²⁷²

American Folk Songs

John and Alan Lomax (father and son, respectively) were ethnomusicologists who aurally documented traditional songs and folk music worldwide in the early to mid-20th century. Alan, in particular, traveled to state and federal prisons during Jim Crow, where Blacks could face imprisonment for simply gathering in a group or walking outside after dusk.²⁷³ The archives of such recordings are significant because they preserve voices of enslaved people, inviting curiosity and deeper understanding of history and culture, and capturing the cruel and desolate conditions Black men and women faced on former plantations during this era.²⁷⁴

American folk music emerged on the American frontier as early as the 18th century.²⁷⁵ Pioneers, miners, and western-bound settlers created songs to articulate their experiences during battles with Native tribes and frontier life. It is important to note that Indigenous folk songs in America have predated English folk songs for hundreds of years.²⁷⁶ Among the catalog of songs and ballads rooted in American folk music are those of the formerly enslaved people and field

²⁷² Concannon, J. (Trans.). (2023, September 15). *The Praties They Grow Small- Queen Grace Music*. https://youtu.be/2eHJZDUv_CY?si=VzZdA_5SCMfn3KQZ

 [The Praties They Grow Small](https://youtu.be/2eHJZDUv_CY?si=VzZdA_5SCMfn3KQZ)

²⁷³ *African American song: Ethnic: Musical styles: Articles and essays: The Library of Congress celebrates the songs of America: Digital Collections: Library of Congress*. The Library of Congress. (n.d.-a). <https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/ethnic/african-american-song/>

²⁷⁴ *Lomax Digital Archive*. The Lomax Digital Archive. (n.d.). <https://archive.culturalequity.org/>

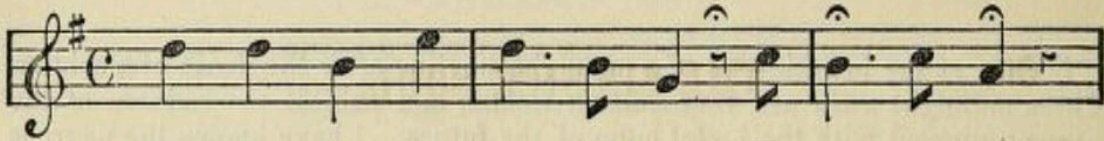
²⁷⁵ Miller, A. (2016, December 9). *What is the oldest American folksong?: Adam Miller - Folksinger and Storyteller*. Adam Miller - Legendary Folksinger, Storyteller and Autoharp Virtuoso. <https://www.folksinging.org/what-is-the-oldest-american-folksong/>

²⁷⁶ Ibid

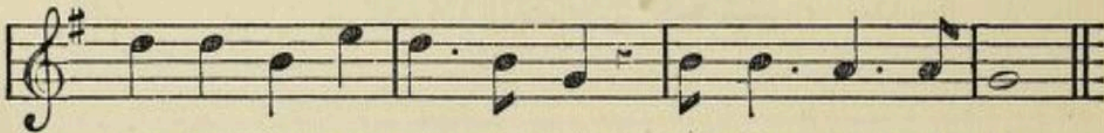
workers who vocally displayed the conditions of American life through their eyes. "No More Auction Block," also known as "Many Thousands Gone," can be seen as one of the most poignant, thought-provoking folk songs birthed during slavery in the same way that "Praties, They Grow Small" is the Potato Famine.

64.

MANY THOUSAND GO.



1. No more peck o' corn for me, No more, no more;



No more peck o' corn for me, Man-y thousand go.

2 No more driver's lash for me.

3 No more pint o' salt for me.

4 No more hundred lash for me.

5 No more mistress' call for me.

[A song "to which the Rebellion had actually given rise. This was composed by nobody knows whom—though it was the most recent doubtless of all these 'spirituals.'—and had been sung in secret to avoid detection. It is certainly plaintive enough. The peck of corn and pint of salt were slavery's rations."—T. W. H. Lt. Col. Trowbridge learned that it was first sung when Beauregard took the slaves of the islands to build the fortifications at Hilton Head and Bay Point.]

Figure 8.2

The Negro Spiritual, “Many Thousands Gone” was first published in 1867 in the book Slave Songs of the United States by William Allen, Lucy Garrison, and Charles Ware.²⁷⁷ As familiar with folk songs, "Many Thousands Gone"(figure 8.2) has the ability to represent a different meaning depending on the singer: enslaved people would often sing the Spiritual, as it brought hope and anticipation for a world without slavery. When sung by “freemen,” it was a song of celebration and freedom, remembering their time in servitude while basking in the throes of emancipation.²⁷⁸

“No More Auction Block” traditionally contains eight verses or stanzas, with the second and fourth lines maintaining the same lyrics as the second and fourth lines in every verse: *3rd- No more, No More. 4th- Many Thousands Gone*. The first and third lines are the same in each verse, which distinguishes each verse from the other: Line 1&3 Verse 1: *No More Auction Block For Me*, Lines 1 and 3 v2: *No More Peck of Corn For Me* (See figure 8.2). The lyrics highlight the extenuating conditions endured by those enslaved. *No more pint of Salt...No more peck of Corn* refers to the rations of food given to those enslaved. Most were often given leftovers and undesirable cuts of meat such as gizzards and pig feet, as Harriet Jacobs points out in the ninth chapter of her narrative.²⁷⁹ *No more auction block...No more driver's lash...No more slavery chains and mistress calls* refer to the flagrant humiliation and sexual abuse at the hands of enslavers and other white males. Such atrocities, vividly documented in the memoirs of Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Harriet Jacobs, and others, should evoke a sense of compassion and reflection in the audience. Bob Dylan was one of the most notable figures to

²⁷⁷ Bell, K. C. (2018, December 24). *Literacy, history, and African American spirituals*. AAIHS. <https://www.aaihs.org/literacy-history-and-african-american-spirituals/>

²⁷⁸ Rosenblatt, P. C., Walsh, R. P., & Jackson, D. A. (1977). *Grief and mourning in cross-cultural perspective*. HRAF Press.

²⁷⁹ Jacobs, H. A., Foster, F. S., & Yarborough, R. (2019). *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: Authoritative text, contexts, criticism*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

popularize this Spiritual in 1963. It also remains a vital part of the repertoire of many notable folk singers, including Paul Robeson, John Legend, Ella Jenkins, and Odetta, fostering a sense of cultural pride and reverence for musical history.²⁸⁰

Matthew Sabatella and the Rambling String Band highlight “Many Thousands Gone” on their Ballad of America album. The band strives to recreate a more traditional ambiance by using instruments like the banjo, fiddle, and guitar, which are integral to authentic American folk music. “The music in America today is part of a continuum that reaches back to the Indigenous peoples and stretches across the Atlantic Ocean to the Old World. Music, instruments, and songs tell the story of the ordinary and extraordinary people who have populated the United States and propelled it into the 21st century.”²⁸¹ This piece was chosen because the Rambling Strings Band’s use of traditional instruments creates a more authentic experience when listening to their folk song covers. They are also among the few to include all eight verses of the ballad, whereas others often perform only three to five. The Rambling Strings Band excels in articulating the verses and instrumental elements, including the classic banjo—an instrument with roots in Africa that was used by enslaved people during field gatherings and in plantation churches.^{282,283}

Historical accounts and oral traditions indicate that Negro Spirituals and field songs were

²⁸⁰ *Performance: No more auction block by Paul Robeson with Lawrence Brown | Secondhandsongs*. SecondHandSongs. (n.d.).

<https://secondhandsongs.com/performance/579841/all>

²⁸¹ Sabatella, M., Doyle, J., & Bieler, E. (2019, October 30). *Many thousand gone: About the song*. Ballad of America. <https://balladofamerica.org/many-thousand-gone/>

 Many Thousand Gone

²⁸² Blackdollarandculture@Gmail.com. (2025, March 24). *The banjo: A black invention that shaped American music*. Black Dollar and Culture. <https://blackdollarandculture.blog/the-banjo-a-black-invention-that-shaped-american-music/>

²⁸³ Kingsley, S. (2025, September 18). *Chronicling “America’s African Instrument”*: Laurent Dubois on the cultural history of the banjo. AHA. <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/chronicling-americas-african-instrument-laurent-dubois-on-the-cultural-history-of-the-banjo-january-2017/>

performed with distinctive characteristics, featuring "...microtonally flatted notes, syncopation, and counter-rhythms enhanced by handclapping in black spiritual performances." Thus, the neutral tone and rhythm of the Rambling Strings Band may not accurately reflect how enslaved Americans would have originally sung pieces like "No More Children Stole... No More Mistress Calls... No More Hundred Lash..." which would likely have contained a wailing inflection typical of traditional spirituals.²⁸⁴

Bob Dylan and Odetta Holmes (known simply as Odetta) have two of arguably the most expressive and monumental covers of "No More Auction Block." Dylan first performed the cover in New York City at the Gaslight Cafe in October 1962. Dylan's drawn-out, semi-lethargic vocal approach makes many of his songs masterful and expressive, aiming to deepen the audience's emotional connection. His rendition of "No More Auction Block" relays the suffering caused by slavery by emphasizing the horrendous conditions of separation, beatings and separation enslaved people endured, and elevating the spiritual and folk song to resonate emotionally with listeners. Dylan has made it clear in interviews that he emphasizes his family history involving Lithuanian Jews and pogroms to help the audience feel a sense of connection and empathy, fostering a deeper cultural appreciation and emotional engagement with stories of suffering.²⁸⁵

Odetta's cover of "No More Auction Block" emotionally impacts listeners as well. Born in the Jim Crow segregated South of Alabama in 1930, Odetta's roots in this challenging

²⁸⁴ *Spirituals: Ritual and worship: Musical styles: Articles and essays: The Library of Congress celebrates the songs of America: Digital Collections: Library of Congress*. The Library of Congress. (n.d.-d).
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/ritual-and-worship/spirituals>

²⁸⁵ Kooper, A. "Bob Dylan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 29, 2025.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bob-Dylan-American-musician>.

environment help the audience feel a sense of admiration and connection to her resilience.^{286,287}

She transferred her pain of segregation into inspiration and a love for spirituals. Odetta became the voice of the Civil Rights Movement and the face of folk songs, spirituals, and the Blues in the mid-20th century, as well as the inspiration for Bob Dylan's pivot to folk music in the 60s. As evident in her cover of “No More Auction Block,” Odetta sang with emotion and conviction.²⁸⁸

“No More Auction Block” and “The Praties, They Grow Small” are both significant folk songs that relay grief and trauma imposed on enslaved African Americans and Potato Famine victims. As in the previous chapter, an analysis of the lyrics reveals the ordeals of sorrow, destitution, and family separation. These songs have endured across generations, demonstrating the resilience of cultural memory and fostering respect for their historical significance. While maintaining their original symbolic premise, they serve as vital links to the past. Whereas the previous chapter emphasized the similarities between Negro Spirituals and Famine Ballads, this chapter emphasizes the importance of their survival through folk songs. Folk music was traditionally passed down aurally from generation to generation; a blessing for those unable to read or write, folk songs can be sung and recited to relay information about the social climate. With deepening political divisions mounting in 21st century America, where ultra-conservative groups have banned books and other sources aimed at raising awareness of historical atrocities in U.S. history, the aural transmission of songs and folklore may once again become prevalent.

²⁸⁶ Protest Magazine. (2023, December 21). *Catch her melody: Odetta*.

²⁸⁷ Moyer, S. (2025, September 19). *Odetta*. Encyclopedia of Alabama.
<https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/odetta/>

²⁸⁸ Levy, L. (Ed.). (2015a, January 8). *Odetta- No More Auction Block For Me*. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/SfbpsmbxE2c?si=XmBg-V5t6BAJ6er->

 Odetta - No More Auction Block For Me

Chapter 9: Conclusion

“Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth” ~ George Orwell²⁸⁹

Psychology Today describes empathy as “the ability to recognize, understand, and share the thoughts and feelings of another person, animal, or fictional character.”²⁹⁰ Developing empathy is crucial for establishing relationships and behaving compassionately. It involves experiencing another person’s point of view, rather than simply one’s own, and enables prosocial, or helping, behaviors that come from within, rather than ones that are forced.”²⁹¹ How we perceive one another and identify with others’ circumstances plays a significant role in our development of empathy. Therefore, our assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes, ignorance, and reservations can pose an extraordinary barrier to developing an empathic understanding for our coworkers, neighbors, associates, and people from other states, countries, and ethnicities. Knowing these barriers, it is equally essential to understand how the ruling classes perpetuate them by limiting the resources available in education, the media, and broader society, thereby limiting one's understanding and exposure to other cultures and ethnicities.

This dissertation offers a framework for challenging stereotypes by exploring the historical, social, and emotional connections between African Americans and Irish Catholics. It emphasizes their shared experiences of oppression by interpreting the grief and suffering expressed in the songs and ballads created during times of subjugation.

²⁸⁹ Orwell, G. (2024). *1984*. Anaconda. Pp 74-75.

²⁹⁰ Sussex Publishers. (n.d.-a). *Empathy*. Psychology Today.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy?msockid=303987beebdd60d03d7497aaeabf6158>

²⁹¹ Ibid

At the beginning of this endeavor, I envisioned a scenario in which I would take my research and create academic programs to infuse genocide studies in a global context into the history or civic education of elementary learning. I perused the elementary school, middle school, high school, and collegiate educational program modules about genocide studies. I was highly enthusiastic about incorporating the Potato Famine, spirituals, and Black-Irish relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. In retrospect, I could have commenced my doctoral studies with those ambitions. My research, however, took me deeper into the ongoing heartbreaking problems of society to uncover what one might call the “cancer of humanity.” With the dismal political climate at home and abroad and the constant tensions in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (and truthfully, all over the world), the powers that emphasize conflicts within humanity are those that agitate them for monetary consolidation.

The historical connection between African Americans and Irish Catholics was not a relationship discussed academically in detail until recent decades. Prior limitations regarding African American history peaked at the Underground Railroad and American Abolitionists' movements. Still, the details in which Black and Irish Americans amalgamated in northern industrial cities, their social and economic reciprocity, as well as the social and financial support Black Abolitionists received from influential Irish figures and organizations, have influenced how the history regarding slavery and indentured servitude in America is taught. It was the premise of this dissertation to accumulate four affirmations:

Affirmation 1: Africans arrived in the English Colonies as Indentured Servants, not chattel enslaved people.

Africans from Angola who first arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 were destined for indentured servitude. Those from the African continent as well as foreign-born immigrants shared the same destiny for decades; however, laws in Virginia and other southern colonies became more restrictive towards Black people, so that by the latter part of the 17th century, any rights that Negroes held were stripped away, thus casting Africans and their offspring into a lifelong chattel slavery for more than 150 years. This affirmation directly challenges the revisionist spectrum (even held in the 21st century) that African Americans gained trade and general skills through slavery, thus making the institution beneficial to Black people. Africans and African Americans could work off their bondage and acquire land, servants, and natural rights afforded to white people. One of the reasons given as to why the restrictions thwarted Black independence was to sever the ties many Blacks developed with whites in the indentured arena, thus deterring race-mixing and uniting to oppose landowner policies. From the beginning, the institution of servitude in the colonies and especially the Caribbean provided conditions for people of African, European, and Indigenous backgrounds to congregate.

Affirmation 2: Black and Irish immigrants faced similar social antagonisms

The largest influx of Irish people to the U.S. occurred in the 19th century due to famine and political and religious oppression. The Irish weren't immediately accepted into the dominant white society; social ostracization by WASP nativists placed the Irish immigrants close to the lowest societal classifications, similar to the Negro class.²⁹² The social isolation endured by Black and Irish immigrants in large, urban industrial cities like Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia,

²⁹² Ignatiev, N. (2015). *How the Irish became white*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

and Manhattan led to competition for resources, including jobs. Although the congested dwellings created opportunities for amalgamation and mixed marriages, the competition also led to friction and divergence. The Irish, leveraging their organized political networks and labor unions, gained access to voting rights and social mobility, which helped them integrate into the middle class. Meanwhile, African Americans continued to face systemic barriers that kept them marginalized, highlighting the racial disparities in urban social dynamics.

Affirmation 3: Irish Abolitionists were instrumental in supporting emancipation and liberation

The fight for emancipation was not an isolated effort; the advocacy to end slavery may have been spearheaded by tremendous African Americans such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, but the assistance from American and Irish Abolitionists, among others, played a pivotal role in denouncing the peculiar institution and assisting Black Abolitionists with this extraordinary undertaking. Daniel O'Connell, deemed the “Great Agitator” who spearheaded Catholic Emancipation, was instrumental in critiquing the institution of slavery in America and was vociferous in his attempts to persuade Irish emigrants to oppose the institution. O'Connell, along with dozens of anti-slavery societies from Belfast to Cork Counties, headed by both men and women, raised funds to support the fight for emancipation and to finance the travels and stays of many Black Abolitionists and “freemen,” including Douglass and Sarah Reymond, as they traveled to Ireland.

After the Civil War, oppression continued for African Americans and Irish Catholics. Struggles centered around women's suffrage, c civil rights, and liberation for both African American and Northern Irish Catholics. Bonds between Black and Irish Nationalists would

continually strengthen during the early 20th century. Civil rights leaders in Ireland and America organized marches, boycotts, and sit-ins to show resistance to their government's laws of oppression.

Affirmation 4: Music can be used to convey grief; the destitution of subjugation was made evident in narratives, spirituals, ballads, and folk music, which can be used to build severed or foreign relationships.

Whether or not certain groups are aware of their cultural history, as is the case with many in the Black and Irish communities, spiritual and emotional bonds can be forged through music. Lyrical expressions channel joy, grief, pain, and anger, sometimes all in one ballad. Spirituals, field songs, chants, and slave songs grew out of the experiences of enslaved Negroes. They represent the struggles, depression, agony, and hope experienced by the enslaved and were often vessels of comfort and direction. Famine Ballads detailed the socio-economic conditions of people in need, catalyzed by the neglect and oppression of the English Crown, which left victims of An Gorta Mor separated from children, spouses, and homes in a state of hunger, sickness, and abject poverty.

This dissertation provides a blueprint for further research on the grief analysis of victims of subjugation. The horrors of slavery and oppression are echoed in the voices of the forgotten. Perhaps a cross-cultural dialogue can be fostered by identifying similarities in the struggles endured by victims of famine, occupation, war, and subjugation worldwide, thereby building empathy and understanding of the oppressor's cultural and historical values and obstacles. By comparing and analyzing narratives and emotional expressions through ballads, spirituals, poems, letters, etc., curated by the thoughts, hands, and voices of these victims, we can identify

themes in crises, which give readers and the descendants of victims a common ground to unify over the commonalities of suffering and grief.

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